Listen up or lose out! Policy and practice of listening skill in English language education in Bangladesh

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

College of Education, Health and Human Development

University of Canterbury

Christchurch, New Zealand

August 2020

Disclaimer

The material presented in this thesis is the original work of the candidate except as acknowledged in the text, and has not been submitted previously, either in part or in whole, for a degree at this or any other university.

The research reported in this thesis has been approved by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury.

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Dedication

To my father, S M Faizul Kabir, whose dream winged me to pursue a PhD. To my mother, Sultana Begum, who showered endless love from the distance of a thousand miles to help me survive. Last but absolutely not least, to my wife, Muntaha Karina, who tolerated my departures that distanced me time and again. She supported me relentlessly. She also took care of our kids: S M Fawzan Kabir and S M Izhaan Kabir, and created a congenial space for me to focus on research.

Acknowledgements

In the name of the Almighty who provided me with the spiritual leverage to finish the journey.

Before I embarked on the PhD journey, I knew that it would not be relaxed. However, I could not realise that the journey would require a Herculean effort! Since I started, I had to bottle up my personal life and emotions to carry out the journey. Sometimes, it seemed to be a journey of self-inflicted torture! At one point, after taking the journey, I plunged into despair for the miseries related to my health condition. I started thinking that a PhD must not appear more important than life! So, I wanted to quit. However, the power of self-motivation and the dream from my father allowed me to have the luxury of hope. I am indebted to my father exceptionally. My indomitable willpower also gave me the passionate hook to pursue the PhD until the last. Therefore, despite a heap of hurdles, such as living in the presence of low temperature, facing the challenge to make a change to my supervisory team, readjusting myself to the relocation of study space repeatedly for the change of campus, surviving the Christchurch shootings without any physical injury but mental agony, and losing my grandparents in the final phase of my thesis writing, I propelled myself through the twist and turns of the journey until I nailed it! Despite all the ups and downs, I embraced the challenge − to get out of my comfort zone, be transformed, and create a better version of myself. After finishing the PhD journey, I now understand that doing a PhD is all about having a passion for learning and figuring things out; being determined, consistent, and focused; and taking good care of oneself during the whole journey.

On the eve of undertaking the journey of the PhD, a separation occurred, and I said adieu to my home country to pursue the journey in New Zealand. I also said adieu to my parents, wife, sisters, brother, friends, and well-wishers but the bond of love remained in distance. It was really hard for me to distance myself from S M Fawzan Kabir, my seven-month-old son. It was one of the rarest moments that shed melancholy upon me and left me in a lamentable situation. Nonetheless, my son has been a source of inspiration throughout the arduous journey.

To earn a PhD degree, I started coping with the prevalent context in New Zealand amidst multiple academic and non-academic challenges. In the making of my thesis, I am indebted to my supervisors, Emeritus Professor Janinka Greenwood and Associate Professor Kevin

Watson. The thesis would not be possible without them. I appreciate their constant support for both academic and personal purposes. They always encouraged me positively whenever I faced any difficulty. I am thankful to Professor Una Cunningham for her two-year supervision before she departed. I also thank Professor Una Cunningham to set up the LATL research lab where I found a group of enthusiastic researchers who helped me consolidate my thoughts into an action plan.

I would further like to extend my gratitude to the Head of the School of Teacher Education, Alison Arrow who supported me to deal with the administrative issues of the university. The years at the University of Canterbury provided the perfect springboard to explore my research interests and made a real impact on my life. A huge thanks to the University of Canterbury and its staff for the opportunities that I was given to grow professionally. At the end of collating the chapters of the whole thesis into one file, I faced trouble. Formatting a formidably long Word file was not my forte. So, Nick Scullin, a fantastic person with great human qualities and academic skills, came up and started helping me out! I earnestly thank him.

I would like to extend my special gratitude to Mahammad Abul Hasnat for his company and consistent support for both academic and non-academic needs during the research journey. I also acknowledge the valuable cooperation of Mesbahuddin Chowdhury and Syed Nizar during this research journey. I would like to appreciate the academic suggestions and cooperation of Bangladeshi doctoral scholars − Md Safayet Alam, Mollah Mohammed Haroon Ar Rasheed, Mohammad Samsuzzaman, Khonker Taskin Anmol, Md Al Amin, Mrinmoy Maitra, Md Mahbubur Rahman, and Sayed Ahmed. I also appreciate the overwhelming support of all other Bangladeshi research scholars at the University of Canterbury (UC). A big compliment goes to the Bangladeshi Students' Association of the University of Canterbury (BSAUC) which has been a space to breathe on different occasions. I am also thankful to Nasibul Haque who helped me eat delicious food in the final phase of my PhD journey. A group of young Bangladeshi students at UC also helped me get rid of monotony during my leisure. They are Md Sagor Hosen, Mishfakul Kabir, Arnob Zahid and Mehedi.

Also, cordial thanks to my international friends and colleagues: William Eulatth Vidal, Karna Rana, Helen Mace, Emma C. Luey, Sara Farshad Nia, Gopal Panta, Teariki Tuiono, Said Zohairy, Mazhar Syed Ahmed, Nidhi Sharma, Priya Mohan, Himasha Gunasekara, Maryam

and Mengping. I am also grateful to the gatekeepers of this study who facilitated my access to the participants. Due to ethical considerations, I cannot disclose their names. However, I can hint that one of them is a government official at the National Curriculum & Textbook Board, Bangladesh. The other two are from my workplace and the IELTS Preparatory Institution respectively.

I am ever grateful to everyone who has been directly and indirectly related to my PhD journey.

Kia mihi[1]!

[1] The Maori word 'Kia mihi' means 'Thank you'.

Abstract

This thesis reports an investigation into the status of listening skill in English language education in secondary schools in Bangladesh. The study also touches upon speaking skill as both listening and speaking skills are symbiotic and can be considered together as the skills of oracy in language education. Although English is a mandatory subject for twelve years of schooling, the reality indicates that students are weak in mastering the language. The students are taught and tested only for orthographic skills excluding listening and speaking skills, whereas it is already known that authentic aural input helps students achieve their overall English language proficiency. Therefore, listening as a skill can facilitate the improvement of the other three basic skills of the English language: speaking, reading, and writing. This rationale gives rise to this study.

The conceptual framework of this study draws on literature from intersecting fields: research from Bangladesh about communicative approaches to English language teaching, the influence of successive colonisations, and international research related to both theoretical understanding of listening skill and the practice of teaching and assessing the skill, and writings about the IELTS listening test.

The overall design of the research is based on grounded theory. The methodology predominantly uses a qualitative framework, with supplementary quantitative survey data. Thus, a pragmatic research approach is applied to this research project. The methods to collect data included semi-structured interviews, surveys, a review of the documents related to curriculum policy, several government gazettes, and artefacts. A corpus-based approach is used following the KWIC (keyword in context) technique for a thematic analysis of the data.

The learning of the English language with communicative competence has become a social and economic force in Bangladesh. So, in the current National Education Policy 2010 and the National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI-X), the competence of the language is recognised as an essential tool for building a knowledge-based society to face the challenges of the 21st century, for jobs locally and globally, and for economic development. Policies argue that Bangladeshi students need to develop oral proficiency and that includes becoming a good listener and speaker. Therefore, the emphasis on communicative competence in English language education is on the increase.

This research explores the policy and practice of listening skill in English language education in Bangladesh. The research study finds multiple disconnections between the policy and practice of listening in secondary classrooms. It then discusses the challenges of implementing listening in classroom practice and assessment procedures. As the National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI-X) suggests a similar sort of assessment to that in IELTS, this research also investigates the experiences of post-secondary IELTS preparatory students and examines their listening difficulties and, from this basis, considers possible ways that listening could be practised and assessed in schools.

In conclusion, the implications of the findings for policy and practice are discussed. A working model is provided that can be used by teachers in the classroom to teach listening. A range of recommendations has been offered to the stakeholders in English language education in Bangladesh. The study also offers a platform for discussion and reflection on listening skill for English language education in Bangladesh and, by implication, in other countries with similar ELT contexts. A direction for future research is also suggested.

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List of Abbreviations

BANA	-	Britain, Australasia, and North America
BCS	-	Bangladesh Civil Service
BELTA	-	Bangladesh English Language Teachers' Association
BISE	-	Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education
BST	-	Behavioural Skills Training
CLT	-	Communicative Language Teaching
DSHE	-	Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education
ELTIP	-	English Language Teaching Improvement Project
EfT	-	English for Today
EIA	-	English in Action
EFL	-	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	-	English as a Second Language
ETTE	-	English for Teaching and Teaching for English
GT	-	Grammar-Translation
GTM	-	Grammar- Translation Method
HSC	-	Higher Secondary Certificate
ICT	-	Information and Communications Technology
IELTS	-	International English Language Testing System
LAL	-	Language Assessment Literacy
LBA	-	Language-based Approach
L2	-	Second Language
M-learning	-	Mobile-learning
NCTB	-	National Curriculum & Textbook Board

NEP	-	National Education Policy
SEQAEP	-	Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project
SSC	-	Secondary School Certificate
SBA	-	School Based Assessment
TBLT	-	Task-based Language Teaching
TPACK	-	Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge
TQI-SEP	-	Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project

Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis investigates the policy and practice of listening in English language education in Bangladesh. The English education policy and curriculum identify 'listening' as one of the major components of English language learning. However, this study finds that listening is seldom taught in the classroom and is not assessed in public examinations. There is consequently a gap between policy and practice. This thesis reports the perceptions of policymakers and teachers to better understand the problems that cause the gap. The mainstream secondary students of Bangladesh study English as a compulsory subject for foreign language education since Grade 1. Nonetheless, their competence in English is still not satisfactory, as their learning of English does not focus equally on the typically divided four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) of the language. More specifically, oral skills are underdeveloped although mandated by the curriculum for classroom teaching and assessment procedure. As this research study specifically investigates listening skill, it has examined the IELTS listening module, particularly because listening exercises and tasks proposed by the NCTB are similar to this widely accepted listening test format available in Bangladesh. Therefore, the thesis also reports the perceptions and experiences of the post-secondary IELTS preparatory course students, experienced IELTS preparatory course trainers, and experienced IELTS test-takers in order to explore listening comprehension difficulties and possible ways of developing listening comprehension skills that could perhaps be practised and assessed in mainstream secondary English education.

The country and its languages

Bangladesh is a developing country with an ancient history. It is a country in South Asia linking a natural gateway between South and South East Asia. It shares its border with India and Myanmar. The country is almost 57,000 square miles in size, making it the 95th largest country by area on earth. It stands as the world's eighth most populous country having more than one hundred and sixty million people. The population is mostly homogeneous and monolingual. The majority of people (98%) share the same culture and speak the same language known as *Bangla* (the word "Bengali" is the anglicised version of *Bangla*[2]). The remaining 2 percent of the population comprises different tribal communities. The tribal

[2] The Constitution of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh recognised the word *Bangla* as the state language of the country. Retrieved from http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/sections_detail.php?id=367&sections_id=24550

groups have their own and unique tribal cultures and languages. The average annual growth of GDP in 2019 is 8.13 %, and the per capita income of the country is USD 1,909 (Ovi, 2019, March 19). The literacy rate is approximately 61.3% for males and 52.2% for females of the total population (BANBEIS, 2017).

The structure of the education system in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has three major stages in Education - a) Primary b) Secondary and c) Higher Education.

Primary Education - Primary education extends over five years and the admission age is Six. Primary education is tuition-free and compulsory for all the citizens of Bangladesh. According to Article 17 of the Bangladesh constitution, " The state shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law" (Ministry of Law, Justice, & Parliamentary Affairs, 2010).

Secondary Education - The cycle of secondary education consists of three segments: the duration of the junior secondary is Three years (From Grade 6 to 8), secondary is of Two years (Grade 9 and 10), and Two years of higher secondary (Grade 11 and 12), respectively (Figure 1). The first public examination is at the end of Grade 10, the Secondary School Certificate (SSC). Similarly, at the end of two years of higher secondary education, students appear at the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination.

Higher Education - Both public and private universities in Bangladesh offer higher education. HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) holders are qualified to enroll for 4-year Bachelor's degrees and subsequently, one or two-year Master's degrees. Those who want to pursue an MPhil or Ph.D. degree in various disciplines or areas of specialization continue for two years and three/four years, respectively (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Streams of the education system

The British legacy of the education system still prevails in the present education system of Bangladesh, although things have changed up to a certain extent (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, and Rahman, 2010). Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, there have been three separate streams in the education system running parallel to one another. Students are free to choose any one of them. The mainstream is called the Bangla-medium secular education system. Another stream is the traditional system of religious education taught in religious

schools called “Madrasah.” The third stream of education is called the English medium, which is designed to align with the British Education system. The schools of this medium conduct classes and exams, but for the evaluation process, they send students’ work to England or the British Council in Dhaka (Mousumi & Kusakabe, 2017). Figure 1 shows the stages and clusters of the Education system of Bangladesh below:

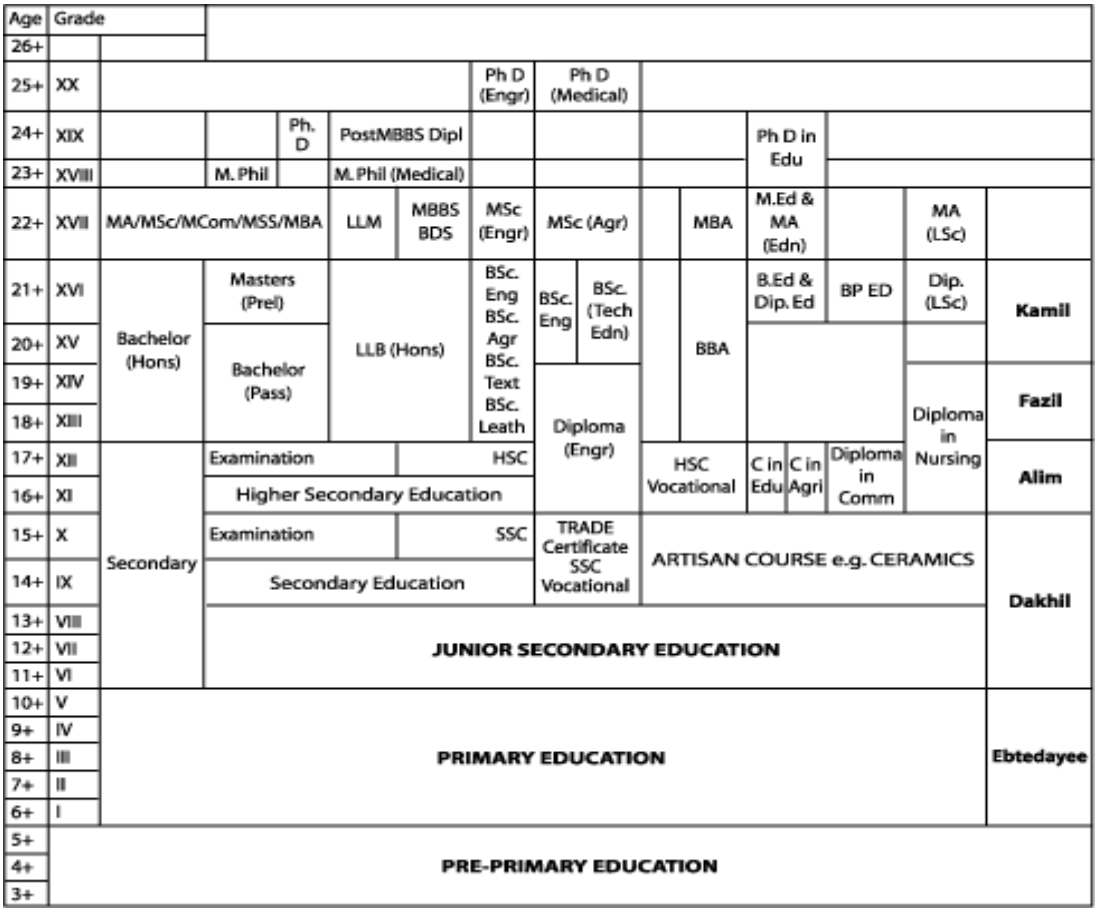

Figure 1. The structure of the education system. (Adapted from the Ministry of Education, 2010)

Aim of the study

This study aims to understand the factors that underlie the relationship between the policies and classroom practice of listening skill in English language teaching, learning, and assessment in Bangladesh. The study further examines the IELTS listening test, an internationally standardised available test in Bangladesh, to understand the potential listening comprehension difficulties of secondary students. The findings of the study will help the secondary English language teachers to understand how to teach listening and assess listening skill so that listening can be functional in the classroom and public examinations. The findings will also potentially help the secondary students in the future to lessen their listening test phobia and problems if they take the IELTS test for a variety of reasons.

Bangladesh adopted the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in 1997. The CLT approach is a way of teaching second and foreign languages that emphasises interaction as the ultimate goal of learning a language. A communicative teaching approach also involves active oral interaction between two or more individuals as a means of learning a language (Alam, 2008; Ali, 2014a). However, the basic two skills in the English language for CLT− listening and speaking − are neither taught nor tested formally for the secondary and higher secondary students of Bangladesh (Shurovi, 2014). The National Education Policy (2010) aimed at achieving effective communication for its learners. In connection with this notion, the National Curriculum & Textbook Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh in 2015 introduced listening comprehension for English language education at the secondary level. The NCTB developed audio materials for listening practice based on the lessons and exercises of the solitary national English book named *English for Today* for Grades 6-10 ("Teachers' Curriculum Guide for English: Class VII", 2017). Although listening materials and tasks are available for secondary students, these are hardly practised in the classroom in connection to developing English language competence. The reason is the absence of a listening test in schools and public exams. According to Shurovi (2014), "if listening isn't tested, the teacher won't teach it" (p. 1265). Listening is in the textbook for secondary students but not in the testing process.

On the other hand, higher secondary students neither have the materials nor are assessed. However, the government is in the process of developing materials following the current textbook for Grades 11 & 12 for the practice of listening comprehension exercises in the classroom. In both secondary and higher secondary contexts, the government is still indecisive about the inclusion of listening in both the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exams for some policy-and-practice-related challenges. As a result, listening has become an issue in Bangladesh since the students do not face any listening tests unless they attempt an IELTS exam for a variety of reasons. The absence of earlier practice of the English language in listening creates a huge problem for the students who come across listening for the first time in the IELTS exam. Therefore, the students who sit for IELTS to go abroad mainly for higher education and migration only prepare themselves for listening tests to achieve the required score of 6.0 or 6.5 band score. They are not taught listening to improve their language proficiency, and they are also not inclined to learn listening comprehension skills to improve their English language competence.

At present, in the Bangladeshi context, the development of listening skill in language education has become a complex issue. Hence, the focus of this study is on Bangladeshi students' listening skill in improving their English. Research literature reviewed in Chapter Three shows that Bangladeshi mainstream students are weak in their use of the English language. But competent listening comprehension skills raise awareness of the language, help students prepare for real-life communication, and can also be motivating for them (Rost, 2016). Deveci (2018), Rost (2016) and Renukadevi (2014) argue that language learning begins with the listening skill that first develops in humans on the basis of the "L1= L2 hypothesis, which holds that L2 learning should be based on the way that children acquire their L1" (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013, p. 252). However, a range of research evidence also argues that L2 cannot be learned like L1 due to the influence of several learning factors (such as motivation, aptitude, learning styles, and learner strategies) and many L2 learners learn their language using a different developmental order (Cook, 2016; Hong, 2018; Kabir, 2015; McCaul, 2016).

The secondary students who intend to go abroad for higher education have to listen more than they need to speak for their academic needs both inside and outside of classrooms. Brown and Lee (2015) also mentioned that students always have to do more listening than speaking in their classroom activities. According to Richards (2008), listening not only helps us comprehend the deliverer of a speech or the speech itself but also bolsters students to learn a language. As a part of the in-class practice, listening activities are undertaken by teachers to increase the listening comprehension ability of students (Kutlu & Aslanoglu, 2009). Moreover, listening is also a major source of English language input to improve proficiency (Rost, 2016).

Rationale for the study

As I mentioned earlier, Bangladesh introduced the CLT approach to its English language teaching and learning in 1997, and until now, the country has not been able to incorporate oral and aural skills in its English language teaching, learning, and testing. Since then, Bangladesh is continuing with the incomplete implementation of the CLT approach (Shurovi, 2014). However, various research studies have argued that to achieve proficiency in any language, listening skill is not only the basis for the development of all other three skills (speaking, reading and writing) but also are the channel through which a learner makes initial contact with the target language and its culture (Stepanovienė, 2012). In the Bangladeshi

context, researchers (such as Alam, 2009; Abedin, 2010) found that students had a problem with EFL listening comprehension in both in-class and out-of-class situations. The secondary students are also not familiar with a standard listening test because this type of test is absent in the classrooms in Bangladesh. Teachers have also very little scope to practice listening tasks (Rasheed, 2017).

According to Butler (2011), most Asian countries adopted CLT as a central approach to teach and learn the English language between the late 1980s to early 1990s. In Bangladesh, CLT emerged in 1997 (Ministry of Education, 2010). Therefore, according to the diffusion of innovation theory of Rogers (1983), in terms of the diffusion of the CLT approach as a new concept in language education, Bangladesh can be considered to be an *early Majority* in the Asian context for adopting the approach after the 1990s. Nonetheless, CLT has not been given a complete implementation in Bangladesh as teaching is only focused on orthographic skills (Shurovi, 2014). However, in an EFL country like Bangladesh, second language learning input is limited within the four walls of a classroom. A lecture on an English subject, on average, is 45 to 55 minutes in duration, and often it is a one-sided delivery from a teacher without many interactive sessions in the classroom (Rahman, Pandian, & Kaur, 2018).

Language learning without oral skills has weakened Bangladeshi students' communicative competence. The students usually score good marks in exams assessed by their reading and writing, but they fail to communicate convincingly in their real-life situations. This situation interrupts what has been proposed in the National Curriculum for English (VI-X):

1. To help students develop competence in all four language skills, i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing.
2. To help students use the competence for effective communication in real life situations.
3. To help students acquire appropriate language and communicative competence for the next level of education.
4. To support them gain accuracy.
5. To facilitate learners to be skilled human resources by using the English language appropriately (p. 36).

Furthermore, this situation hinders the goals of the National Education Policy 2010 which aspires to enable students to achieve English language competence in all forms, along with ICT, math, and science education "to ensure skills of a high standard at different areas and levels of education so that learners can successfully compete at the global context to build up

a digital Bangladesh based on knowledge-orientation and cultivation of ICT" (p. 2). This study aims to explore to what extent Bangladeshi learners are developing their listening fluency because language learning begins with listening (Saville-Troike, 2012). The current Education Policy 2010 incorporated both listening and speaking skills for its English education and English textbooks have been designed in accordance with the policy. However, although the listening module is now in policy and classroom practice, it is neither assessed in school exams nor public exams at the secondary level.

This study is significant because little research has been done in Bangladesh so far on listening skill and its significance for language competence, let alone on the teaching of listening in the connection to language learning. Even internationally, the research on listening in language education has always been side-lined in comparison to the research into reading and writing. Speaking and listening are often assumed to be picked up or developed easily (Stepanovienė, 2012). As a result, listening has remained under-researched. Since listening skill for language competence has been introduced recently in secondary and higher secondary education in Bangladesh, the teaching of listening has greater importance. Students do not face a listening skill test before they attempt the IELTS exam for a variety of reasons. So, to get an overview of listening skill for English language education in Bangladesh, this study included participants from policy-level stakeholders, secondary teachers from both urban and rural English teachers, the trainers of IELTS preparatory courses, the IELTS preparatory students and the experienced IELTS test-takers who have already taken IELTS test.

Why the IELTS listening test is included in this study

IELTS is used, at present, as one of the most acclaimed ESL tests conducted at hundreds of local centres in more than 130 countries. The listening tasks proposed in the English textbooks for the secondary students have similarities to the IELTS listening tasks in terms of activities and purpose of understanding English in everyday contexts such as "asking for and giving directions of a place, describing a map, location, etc.; asking for and responding to help; giving and understanding announcements in the bus/railway stations, airports or any other places" (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a, p. 76). Moreover, the listening test items which are proposed by the curriculum are based on exercises of filling in the gaps to insert the missing information from listening tapes available online and matched with the exercises in *English for Today (EfT)* textbooks. Students are supposed to practise the

exercises through gap-fillings and multiple-choice questions to answer from student-student, student-teacher, and student-technology interactions and to be assessed in the classroom (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a). This does not often happen. Therefore, the IELTS is the only available test to look into as the best format of a probable listening test to be matched as there is a clear mention of the listening assessment to be done in the classroom after the practice.

In Bangladesh, potential IELTS test-takers face a listening skill test for the first time as there is no listening test included in the secondary or higher secondary education in Bangladesh. Although the NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) has included listening skill for English language education since 2015, listening skill has not been tested and still, there are misconceptions about teaching and learning of listening comprehension skills to improve English language proficiency for the learners of secondary and higher secondary levels. Those who attempt an IELTS test after their higher secondary education in Bangladesh face listening skill for the first time. However, they only prepare themselves to score for the IELTS listening test. Therefore, they just practice listening exercises and adopt exam-related strategies to answer the questions in the IELTS listening test. The IELTS test does not transfer to the classroom teaching of listening. However, although the goals of listening fluency in secondary English language education are different from the IELTS listening goals, the types of tasks and the exercise in the *EfT* textbooks are somewhat similar to the IELTS listening tasks. Therefore, the experience of the IELTS listening phase will help the researcher to understand the listening difficulties that the post-secondary students face while preparing for the IELTS listening test. Thus, researchers can find ways and strategies for secondary teachers to teach listening to the secondary students. Consequently, the students will get a better opportunity to increase their listening comprehension skills for language learning, not just preparing them to measure their listening for a listening test.

Background of IELTS in Bangladesh

As mentioned previously, Bangladeshi higher secondary students do not practice listening and speaking, although listening and speaking are the fundamental aspects of language learning and necessary to make CLT successful in Bangladesh (Shurovi, 2014). However, in Bangladesh, more and more students every year plan to go abroad for work or study to enhance their global education and employment opportunities − as a result, the number of IELTS test participants has increased rapidly in Bangladesh (British Council, 2016). Since

IELTS is a tough test for many test-takers and assesses oral as well as written skills, candidates attempt to prepare for the test with the assistance of various local coaching and training centres. Many test-takers also take IELTS preparatory courses offered by the British Council Centres and IDP centres across the country (Chowdhury, 2009).

The preparatory courses offered by the privately run training centres and the British Council Centres and IDP are usually three to four months long. Chowdhury (2009) mentioned that 45% of the IELTS trainers in his study complained that the IELTS courses offered in Bangladesh are too short and insufficient to prepare the test-takers to gain the requisite score for their targets (e.g. application to overseas universities). The reason is that higher secondary school leavers do not typically have good knowledge of English. This is particularly related to oral skills since these are not practised at schools. In our country, we seem to place a lot of importance on reading and writing even before the learner is thorough with her listening and speaking skills (Chowdhury, 2009).

Outline of the thesis

The thesis is divided into several parts. The first four chapters − introduction, context, literature review, and methodology − lay the foundations of the study. The next three chapters¸ from Chapter Five to Chapter Seven, are based on the research questions. Each chapter answers and discusses aspects of the research questions that are mentioned in Chapter Four. Chapter Eight wraps up the overview of the study with recommendations to deal with the research findings.

Chapter Two explains the background of the study (the Bangladeshi context) to provide the relevant foundation of the following literature review, research methodology, and findings that can be better understood. It describes several aspects related to the historical, social and political, and philosophical aspects of English language education, its curriculum and practice, and the methodological dilemmas of teaching and learning English in Bangladesh. It also highlights various training programmes for English language education, the shortcomings of the training programmes, classroom needs, neglect of oral skills and procedures for their assessment, and the importance of listening fluency in attaining language proficiency.

Chapter Three reviews the existing literature that is relevant to and supports this study. In the first part of this chapter, I have reviewed the literature related to the curriculum policy and its implementation (or lack of implementation) in classroom practice, the current

approaches to English language education, including the use of ICT for more communicative culture in a classroom. In the second part of this chapter, I have reviewed the literature related to the challenges and difficulties of listening comprehension and the teaching of listening skill both in local and international contexts.

Chapter Four explains the methodology of the research. It starts with a presentation of the research questions. It then describes the procedures of data collection procedures and tools, selection of the participants, access to the field, and theoretical approach. Since the study has both qualitative and quantitative phases, the methodology of each phase is explained in detail in the chapter.

Chapter Five describes and discusses the findings in relation to the first two research questions. It reports both policymakers' and teachers' statements about the problems related to the landscape of English language education in the country. It further highlights how and why the policies of oral skills do not synchronise with the classroom practice and assessment. It also discusses the methodological debates (such as CLT, GT, or other methods) about language teaching and the myths about the debate. It also examines the reasons for the neglect of oral skills, in particular, the practice of listening, and discusses their importance for overall English language competence.

Chapter Six examines the issues related to the teaching and assessment of listening in schools and national examinations. It identifies a range of problems faced by both policymakers and teachers in implementing listening skill in English language education. From discussing the imperatives for communicative classroom culture and the need to provide adequate technical and administrative support for implementing listening at school and in the assessment procedure, the chapter reports the initial ideas offered by the participants for means of fostering better learning of English for communicative purposes which is the goal of the National Education Policy and the National Curriculum.

Chapter Seven begins with a brief background explanation about the IELTS listening test and the test-takers in Bangladesh. It shares the experiences and challenges of the post-secondary students in tackling the listening test and the comprehension difficulties they encountered when they took preparatory courses for the IELTS test. The chapter then identifies the major listening difficulties that the post-secondary students from Bangla medium have faced during their preparatory courses. The difficulties have been two types: 1. the text-related difficulties and 2. the task-related difficulties. It concludes with the strategies

proposed by the trainers and experienced test-takers to deal with the difficulties and relates emergent findings to what is discussed in the literature.

Chapter Eight summarises the findings of the thesis and explores their implications for policy, practice, and future research. It encapsulates the key discussions and findings reported in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven followed by a discussion in light of existing research findings. It offers suggestions to deal with the issues discussed in the thesis. In the end of the chapter, the implications, contributions, and future research directions are also discussed.

Chapter Two: The Bangladeshi Context of English Language Education

The current Education Policy has placed the English language as one of the instrumental elements for the economic growth of the country emphasising the need to learn English for communication both locally and globally (Ministry of Education, 2010). The report of the Education Commission formed for education in the 21st century identified secondary education as the gateway to life. This indicates that the required skills for a practical working life should be acquired through secondary education (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a). Furthermore, following this philosophy, both National Education Policy 2010 and National Curriculum 2012 emphasise the need to facilitate learners to become skilled human resources by using the English language for professional, inter-cultural, economic, and international needs. Research also argues that the role of English as a language is necessary for the economic growth of the country (Rahman et al., 2019). International research affirms that the East and Southeast countries in Asia have adopted English language education in their education policies to accept the reality of global connections for many reasons such as trade and commerce, education and training, science and technology (Butler, 2014; Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014). So, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the historical, social, economic and academic benefits of learning English in Bangladesh. It also reports the philosophical underpinning of policy and practice of the English language curriculum for the secondary level both in urban and rural contexts. The chapter also reports the current need for improving oral skills focusing more on listening skill for enhancing English language proficiency.

Historical montage of the English language education in Bangladesh

This historic review is necessary as there is a lack of comprehensive accounts or critiques of English language education in Bangladesh. Therefore, an understanding of the history of English language education is important in this regard.

The English language in Bangladesh gained its root through British colonial imposition. English was imposed colonially upon the Indian Sub-continent. Charles Grant, the Director of the East India Company and a friend of William Bentinck, in 1772, implanted the idea to anglicise the people of Asiatic territories through English education. He said. “By planting our language, our knowledge, our opinions, and our religion in Asiatic territories, we shall

put our great work beyond the reach of contingencies" (Choudhury, 2001, p. 18). Later on, being a member of the Governor General's council, Thomas Babington Macaulay in his "*Minute on Education*" in 1835 advocated the superiority of the English language to the indigenous languages of the Indian Sub-continent and urged the desirability of disseminating Western learning, especially British literature, on the scaffold of English language (Ghosh, 1993). The decision was a political one to prolong the dominance of British rule in this sub-continent in the guise of a language issue. It became more transparent to understand the underlying intention of Macaulay (1835) as a mouthpiece of the then British regime when he uttered: "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (cited in Saraceni, 2015, p. 151). Macaulay (1835) justified the move to establish the supremacy of European cultures and literature over indigenous cultures and literature of the Indian Sub-continent as follows: "A single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (cited in Momma, 2013, p. 97). Subsequently, in 1837, English was adopted by the East Indian Company as the language of administration. As a result, English officially entered the educational arena of the sub-continent. Since then, English as a medium of instruction began to dominate the whole education system of the Sub-continent.

After the departure of colonial forces in 1947, English studies were transformed in the sub-continent, including Bangladesh, which was then the part of Pakistan known as East Pakistan as the other part of Pakistan was known as West Pakistan. Although after 1947, English was accepted by the then Pakistan Government as an official language, there was a discordance between East and West Pakistan on the issue of the national language (Amir, 2008). *Bangla* was the native language of then East Pakistan and Urdu was the major language of West Pakistan (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014). This issue led the people of East Pakistan to sacrifice their lives in 1952 to defend their native language as West Pakistan sought to proscribe and replace it with Urdu as a national language. 1952, known as the year of the *Language Movement*, is believed to be the nucleus to spur the war of independence in 1971 against Pakistan. According to Amir (2008), this conflict over the language issue later paved the way for the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 by creating linguistic nationalism in response to the then West Pakistani domination. *Bangla*, as a language, became a symbol for Bangladeshis both for their national identity and their struggle against suppression and injustice. Therefore, it was not unexpected that *Bangali Nationalism* underpinned language

and education policies in a newly liberated country. As a result, "English thus lost its status as a medium of educational instruction, which it had had until 1971, and was replaced by *Bangla* at all levels of education" (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008, p. 20).

Since the independence of Bangladesh, the country has not had a language-in-education policy (Islam, 2015). Hence, the decisions related to the English language-in-education policy in Bangladesh have consistently been influenced by the determination and reflection of the existing government. After the 1990s, due to the decision of the then government, English was reinstated as a compulsory subject for education, trade, commerce, and cross-cultural potential (Shamsuzzaman, 2015). The decision was underpinned by the notion of "early exposure, better learning" of English (Phillipson, 1992) which is further based on the critical period hypothesis, a concept that is heavily disputed yet widely accepted in the literature of language learning research (Strid, 2017). However, the inception of the English language in Grade 1 did not make a significant improvement in English proficiency among the secondary students, which was evident in different findings and reported in newspapers as well (Al Amin, 2017; Islam, 2015).

English language in the social context of Bangladesh

Although Bangladesh was no longer part of India after 1947 and won its independence in 1971, a strong residue of colonial English still exists in the areas of society such as education and the media due to the history of British colonialism. Mostafa and Jamila (2012) stated that "in independent Bangladesh, English occupies the place of being the most important foreign language", and that "it is taught and learned as a compulsory subject alongside *Bangla*, the first language, from the primary level up to the highest level of study" (p. 26). Bangladeshis possess great pride in their language. The people in Bangladesh celebrate *Mother Tongue Day* as a holiday to recognize their martyrs who sacrificed their lives to uphold the language in the language movement in 1952. Later on, since 1998, the day has been recognised by UNESCO as *International Mother Language Day*. The name of the country, Bangladesh literally means "The land of the people who speak Bangla". Despite this linguistic patriotism, English is assumed to be an asset for many reasons and is a significant part of Bangladeshi society (Ehret, 2014). So, in reality, although the country and its macro-level policy emphasise *Bangla*, English is endorsed by the practical needs of higher education and the job market, such as in the bank sector, multinational companies, non-government organisations, international organisations, and higher studies abroad. The English language also carries

social prestige among the elites. The young generation, especially in urban areas, is currently more motivated to use the English language every day and in a range of contexts than their rural counterpart. In my view, all of these features indicate the shift of the status of the English language in Bangladesh from a foreign language to a de facto second language. These factors made the language prominently visible everywhere in the urban areas of the country (Islam, 2015). This prevalent situation is partly responsible for creating the social divide between urban-rural contexts for quality in education as well as the public-private variance in education in Bangladesh. Islam (2015) highlighted that the students in rural areas are far behind their urban counterparts in their performance in the English language in HSC public examination. So, many wealthier students from rural schools were moved to urban schools by their guardians, as most of the rural schools lacked trained English teachers, materials, and library facilities. However, the Sections of the Constitution of Bangladesh directly conflict with the prevailing social dichotomy created by this language issue:

> Section 2, Article 17(a) - the State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of − (a) establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law; and
>
> Section 2, Article 19(2) – the State shall adopt effective measures to remove social and economic inequality between man and man and to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth among citizens, and of opportunities in order to attain a uniform level of economic development throughout the Republic. (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 70)

So, the position of the English language in the social context of Bangladesh is complex and has generated multiple issues related to Education policy, planning, and curriculum design in Bangladesh.

English language in the education policy of Bangladesh

Over the last four decades, different governments introduced different policies for English language education in Bangladesh. Therefore, English language education in Bangladesh has not been given a consistent level of attention. The need for the English language was not addressed directly from the time of the first Education Commission of Bangladesh − *Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission*[3] − until the recent National Education Policy 2010

[3] The Commission was formed in 1972 and submitted its report in 1974.

(Appendix A). The policy designed by the first Education Commission emphasised the importance and necessity of the English language in the curriculum and proposed to include English as a subject from either Grade 3 or Grade 6. However, the issue of the inclusion of English whether from Grade 3 or not was to be decided by the availability of trained teachers. The Commission recommended that as *Bangla* was the national language of Bangladesh, it should enjoy the status of a medium of instruction at all levels. However, English should be taught from primary to higher education levels as a mandatory foreign language, in the way it was taught before the independence of the country (Podder, 2011). The Government in 1987 passed a law named the "Bengali Language Implementation Act" to attach greater importance to *Bangla* language. This law reduced the importance of the English language as it would be considered illegal for anyone to put forward an appeal for official purposes in any other language than *Bangla* (Hasan, 2014; Rukanuddin, 2014). It meant *Bangla* had to be used for all purposes and at all levels of government. Hence, English was withdrawn as a compulsory subject from the tertiary level. According to Rahman et al. (2010), this was done by the religiously motivated military regimes (1975 - 1990) to show the supremacy of the *Bangla* language, not for the sake of the development of *Bangla* language but for their political interest so that they could erase secularism to establish religious education that could be used as an agenda for gaining the votes of religious people in electoral politics by defeating the secular opponents. Later, the democratic practice was established in the 1990s, and many significant changes and reforms were formulated to bring back the secular spirit in the policy of education along with English. English as a language gained its foothold again as a compulsory subject from Grade 1 to the tertiary level in 1992 as a part of ongoing educational reform.

For the adaptation of the new policy, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (1996) conducted a survey in 1990 to evaluate the English proficiency of learners from Grade 1 to Grade 12, but unfortunately, they found a depressing scenario of English language education because of the damage caused in the previous policies. Therefore, the government was triggered by the situation to re-introduce English to every level of its education. The government also adopted a methodological shift from a traditional Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)[4] to a more communicative mode of teaching and learning English in Bangladesh (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Rahman, 2007). Subsequently, a Communicative

[4] The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is a method of second language teaching that stands mostly on the grammar and translation of passages from the native language into the target language

Language Teaching (CLT) English curriculum was also introduced at the secondary level in 1996 with a new hope to bring positive change in the teaching and learning of English (Sultana, 2018).

In Bangladesh, the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) prevailed in teaching and learning the English language since the country's inception in 1971 until CLT was introduced in the late 90s. The CLT method entered into English language education as the prevalent method of foreign language learning at that time (Hamid, 2010). During the 1970s, it was of vital importance to focus on grammatical rules, and syntactic structures, along with rote memorisation of vocabulary and translation of literary texts. The traditional GTM supports a teacher-centred approach to the classroom. A teacher is the centre point of teaching and is given the sole authority. A teacher is the main source of instruction and a lecture-giver. A teacher's role in GTM includes: giving lectures; explaining everything to the learners; translating everything from the target language to the learners' mother tongue; providing models of writing; conducting practices; and correcting mistakes (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

In Bangladesh, GTM has leveraged very little beyond an insight into the grammatical rules attending the process of translating from the second to the native language. The teachers of English consider literature and grammar as the only means of teaching the English language (Billah, 2015). Later, due to the inefficacy of the existing practices of GTM, a methodological transformation to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach took place in English language policy in Bangladesh through the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) under the Ministry of Education in July 1996. However, the CLT approach, in reality, was introduced into classrooms through two new textbooks of English for SSC and HSC levels in 2001 and 2002 respectively (Alam, Zaman, Khan, and Rahman, 2014). The name of the two books are: *English for Today* (Classes 11-12) and *English for Today* (Classes 9-10).

Although the CLT approach had been prescribed to teach English for more than two decades, the learning outcomes for students were not up to the expected level (Rasheed, 2013). There was a disconnection between policy and practice. The main reason is that shifting from the GT method to the CLT method did not ensure the relevant infrastructural facilities (such as classroom settings, CLT- relevant teaching aids) and the approach to English language learning and teaching remained as it had been in the past (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Podder, 2013; Rasheed, 2013). A reason for the continuation of the GT method is that the majority of

the practising teachers of the English language are the product of the GT method and are not pedagogically trained in the CLT method (Hasan & Akhand, 2009). Hamid and Honan (2012) also pointed out that, although a learner-centred pedagogical approach was the prescribed CLT method for teaching language, the teacher was the controller of the classroom for any initiation or activity, which hindered actual student-student communication. This hindrance is the opposite of the espousal of the ultimate goal of the CLT approach − the communicative competence of language learners.

One of the major reasons for this hindrance is the absence of pre-service teachers' training. Hamid (2010) and Rahman (2019) argue that there is a paucity of research on Bangladeshi ELT-related teachers' training although it is recognised that it is essential to increase their professional capacity which is essential in order to develop learners' English competence. Although the government provides in-service teacher education programmes such as Certificate in Education (C-in-Ed) and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) to the secondary teachers to improve their professional capacity, Government Teachers' Training Colleges (TTCs) do not have the capacity to enrol all the secondary teachers who seek admission to a BEd program or C-in_Ed (Rahman, Pandian & Kaur, 2018). A number of studies (Al Amin and Greenwood, 2018; Rahman and Pandian, 2018) revealed several challenges pertinent to teacher education programmes such as the rarity of training sessions, less opportunity for the rural teachers, shortage of teachers' trainers, ineffective training materials, and insufficient resources to make these training programs effective.

At present, the goals of the National Curriculum for English (2012a) are made to align with the Nation Education Policy 2010. The policies consider English as one of the means of transforming the country into Digital Bangladesh by 2021. The policies aim to achieve the goal of the government as the English language can help contribute to the areas of national development, such as "to achieve developments in science, technology, higher education, business, industry and particularly in communications and IT skills" (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a, p. 73). Therefore, the importance of the English language reaches beyond the consideration of being a subject taught at schools and colleges. Centring on this idea of development using the English language in the National Education policy 2010, English is taught as a compulsory subject in Bangladesh from Grade 1 to Grade 12. Moreover, it is taught as a non-major course for students studying every discipline in tertiary education (Rahman & Pandian, 2018).

The philosophical foundation of the National Curriculum 2012 for English language education

The philosophical foundation of a curriculum helps determine the driving purpose of education, as well as the roles of the various stakeholders. The philosophical foundation of English education in Bangladesh, followed by both National Education Policy 2010 and National Curriculum 2012, is underpinned by constructivist theory for its approach to learning. In this regard, Jonassen (1999) espoused:

> Constructivist conceptions of learning, on the other hand, assume that knowledge is individually constructed and socially co-constructed by learners based on their interpretations of experiences in the world. Since knowledge cannot be transmitted, instruction should consist of experiences that facilitate knowledge construction (p. 217).

Following this notion, the government adopted a policy for secondary and higher secondary levels to promote learning through practice and interaction in such a way that not only a student can connect the classroom learning to his/her schema but also can apply that new learning in real-life situations. Moreover, the curriculum policy also discourages rote learning by accentuating more focus on learning by understanding to cement the learning of the learners for perpetuity. To make this happen, the national English curriculum emphasised the usage of multimedia and ICT in the classroom to visualise teaching materials for both crystallising the topic idea and making the classroom vibrant. In line with this concept, the National Curriculum 2012 for English (Classes VI-X) also promotes *peer learning* and *collaborative learning* in the classroom. It further suggests that " Group work not only increases a learner's knowledge and skills, but also his human qualities such as discipline, tolerance, leadership, and mutual understanding" (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a, p. 22).

In implementing the above-mentioned activities, the National Curriculum 2012 for English (Classes VI-X) has adopted the *investigation process* of learning based on Dewey's Action Hypothesis which also aligns with constructive activities. Dewey (1897) said:

> I believe, therefore, in the so-called expressive or constructive activities as the centre of correlation, in all his [learner] training or growth. The social life gives the unconscious unity and the background of all his [learner] efforts and all his attainment (p. 44).

In this investigation process, education is considered a conjoining process of living experience with new learning where the child is the centre of concern. A child-centred approach to education puts the emphasis on learning about the needs and interests of the child. In this way, Dewey (1907) discarded the form of authoritarian teaching methods. This means that students must interact with their environment in order to adapt and learn. Dewey (1907) averred that children should be allowed to explore their environments. He also emphasised an interdisciplinary curriculum that focused on plugging into multiple subjects where students would pursue their interests and construct their own ways of learning and applying knowledge. Dewey (1907) advocated the same idea for teachers where teachers and students must learn together; however, the role of a teacher in this sort of setting would be to aid more as a facilitator than an instructor. Dewey's classroom is deeply rooted in democratic concepts, which promoted the equal voice of all participants in the learning experience and the teacher should observe the interests of students, observe the turns they naturally take for learning, and then be someone who helps the problem-solving of the students. To define democracy, Dewey denotes education as a tool to enable citizens to mingle their culture and vocation properly.

The current National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI-X) also has emphasized the *eclectic* approach to teaching so that a teacher can apply multiple methods of teaching if needed according to the need for learning. So, teachers should be trained in such a way that they become competent to use different teaching methods in the classroom. The curriculum has identified two categories of workloads for the learning process: a. *classwork* and b. *homework*. Practice and activities related to all four skills – listening to speaking, reading, and writing – are considered to be *classwork* for English language education. The other type of learning (i.e. *homework*) should facilitate students' thinking ability and creativity to align with ideas gained from the classrooms. In this regard, the curriculum suggested that "the specimen homework shown in the curriculum matrix can be followed. Homework should be designed in a way so that those can be done in 20-25 minutes" (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a, p. 27). As far as the assessment procedure is concerned, the curriculum proposed two types of assessment: a. continuous assessment, and b. terminal and public examinations. The continuous assessment covers 20% of marks and is added to the remaining 80% of marks of the terminal and public examinations. As a part of this type of assessment, English teachers are supposed to assess a student continuously following the combined performance of a student in both classwork and homework. The teacher should

keep three records of a student's assessment done every two months. Terminal and public examinations follow the pattern of the questions in a creative way that can assess students' cognition, comprehension, application, and higher skills (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a).

Do policy and practice concur with the textbook?

It is possible to observe the curriculum of an educational organisation from two distinctive perspectives. In the first instance, we can observe the curriculum policy, that is regarding the curriculum at a decision-making level, concerning students' needs and purposes, establishing desires and goals, choosing and grading content, establishing appropriate learning arrangements and learner groupings, choosing, adapting or developing appropriate substances by studying responsibilities and assessment and evaluation process. Alternatively, we can study the curriculum in practice. The second viewpoint takes us into the classroom. Here, we can investigate the actual practices of the teaching, learning, and assessment action that have been described in intention in curriculum policy. Therefore, it is important to investigate connections between policy and practice proposed for listening in English textbooks of the secondary level to find out what students are taught and what fails to be taught, and examined, although planned in the policy.

Since 1997, the English language policy of Bangladesh stipulated the CLT approach and developed CLT-based English textbooks at primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels. The approach to CLT and its materials were assumed to equally and practically focus on the integration of four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. CLT has been advocated as an approach to language education that emphasises pragmatic competence more than linguistic competence in a language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Savignon, 2001). According to Cook (2003), the outcome of CLT - based language teaching should be that "language learning success is to be assessed neither in terms of accurate grammar and pronunciation for their own sake, nor in terms of explicit knowledge of the rules, but by the ability to do things with the language, appropriately, fluently, and effectively" (p. 36). Consequently, an English language class needs to be interactive and participatory to develop all four skills through peer discussion, pair work, and group work with the support of a teacher. Moreover, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (2012b) mandated that:

> In a communicative language curriculum, *how to teach* is more important than *what to teach.* This emphasises that

- All four basic language skills should be practised in classrooms.
- Skills should be practised in an integrated manner - not in isolation.
- Skills practice should be done in meaningful contexts, i.e., practice in language use should go beyond the textbook and include real-life situations.
- Interactive activities should be carried out between teachers and students, and, more importantly− between students and students.
- Graded grammar should be taught through the communicative approach (p. 26).

However, in practice, teaching and learning English in Bangladesh does not live up to these expectations. In fact, Bangladeshi students leave higher secondary with limited oral and aural proficiency. The basic concept of inclusion of listening and speaking for communicative language learning of English in Bangladesh is ignored. At the higher secondary level, students are not required to pass any exams based on listening and speaking skills, so listening and speaking classes are not held for practice. Exams are based on only reading and writing skills leading both the teachers and learners to be exam-focused and at the same time disinclined, to practice listening and speaking skills for the practical learning of English (Shurovi, 2014). It seems that the country has "put the cart before the horse" for its English language teaching and learning process.

Consequently, although the CLT-based textbook contains materials and activities for both listening and speaking, in reality, classroom teaching and testing only cover the reading and writing portions of the text. Since these basic skills for language learning are not included in the testing system (Ahmed, 2014), average students rarely become competent in spoken English for practical purposes. This situation reminds me of a very old *Bangla* proverb that is "কাজির গরু কিতাবে আছে কিন্তু গোয়ালে নাই" (The cow of the religious arbiter exists on paper, not in reality). Despite the goal and objectives of the textbooks of English emphasising all four skills, in reality, listening and speaking are not taught or assessed in an examination at any level of its education. Therefore, although the focus shifted from the Grammar-Translation approach to the CLT approach to learn the English language on paper and in policy, the status quo of classroom English teaching and learning in the country has remained the same over the last two decades. The other reason for the ineffectiveness of CLT in Bangladesh lies

in the scarcity of support for and supply of trained ELT teachers to adapt to the newly designed communicative curriculum (Ali & Walker, 2014).

In that regard, the existing teachers are not provided with sufficient and proper training for the CLT approach or any other ELT pedagogy to implement in English language teaching in the classroom (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Rahman, 2010; Shurovi, 2014). Most of the teachers (Rahman, 2018) only received 13-day CLT training as part of the project of ELTIP (English Language Teaching Improvement Project) in Bangladesh. This was insufficient to transform their attitudes and beliefs from the outdated GT method to CLT in their classroom teaching practice and there was no synergy among the stakeholders, such as teachers, learners, curriculum developers, and policymakers (Ali & Walker, 2014).

Bangladesh, being one of the developing countries of the world and having *Bangla* as the only national language, is probably one of the homogeneous and predominantly monolingual countries (Hamid & Erling, 2016). As a result, there are no local varieties of English in terms of linguistic aspects such as dialect on the part of speakers from different corners of the country. Therefore, everyone has similar intelligibility to the English language. Although English is not yet widely used in all walks of the society parallel to its first language *Bangla* except for educational needs and foreign communication, the latest National Education Policy 2010 evaluated the English language as the tool to create a knowledge-based society (Ministry of Education, 2010). For this reason, the current National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI-X) has recognised the English language as a foreign language on paper but denotes that the English language has shifted its status from a foreign language to a second language in practice. In reality, English is the second language of the country; and in many sectors and jobs, English is more important than *Bangla* − the first language − in Bangladesh (Hasan, 2016; Rasheed, 2013). Thus, to face the global challenge of the 21st century, with changes in various sections of life, knowledge, and civilization, a new English curriculum in Bangladesh was necessary (Ministry of Education, 2010).

In response to this idea, the National Education Policy 2010 states that English teaching and learning should prepare learners to achieve necessary language skills, learn about culture and values, attain a positive attitude, and deal with the challenges of higher education for better employability locally and globally. As a consequence, the current education policy has compromised with its CLT approach to teaching English. The main notion behind this is that CLT has been functioning, at least on paper, for almost two decades but the current teaching

practices are not enough to accomplish the aspiration of preparing Bangladeshi learners to face the challenges of the 21st century in terms of language scholarship (Ministry of Education, 2010). Another reason is the inconsistency between the learners' gained scores of English as a subject in SSC and HSC and their linguistic performance in competitive exams such as the university entrance test. After the recent HSC result ("Most GPA 5 scorers fail DU admission tests," 2015), a surprising statistic has been observed. Studying English as an EFL for as long as 12 years (focus on reading and writing only) and achieving an average of 80 percent of marks in English as a subject in both the SSC and HSC exams, most of the students failed to score the minimum qualifying marks in the entrance tests of different public universities of Bangladesh based on their reading and writing components. This scenario has been evidenced over the last few years. In this regard, it is palpable that there are mainly three factors to take into account: firstly, a gap between the test-contents of public university entrance exams and the current syllabus of English language education for SSC and HSC, secondly, a gap between the actual learning outcomes of the SSC and HSC students and the English test scores for the SSC and HSC levels, and thirdly, a gap between the English language education policy and the existing practice of teaching and learning of English.

In this situation, Bangladesh is passing through a transitional stage in the landscape of English studies (Shamsuzzaman, 2015). Rasheed (2017) relevantly mentions that students of Bangladesh require both communicative competence and criticality to interpret ideas of different contexts such as global needs, political influences on language, and the future directions of world Englishes. However, instead of realizing this fact, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board changed the '*English for Today*' textbooks for both SSC and HSC in 2015 to include a variety of reading materials with grammar focuses and − literary pieces. The textbooks have been made as a synthesis between formal grammar and communicative language practices. National Curriculum and Textbook Board (2012) stated in the preface of its *Teachers' Curriculum Guide* for Grade 11-12 that: "The English curriculum for Classes 11-12, is consistent with the curriculum for Grades 1 to 10 in respect of content and pedagogy. However, it addresses the concerns of language practitioners, teachers, students, and other stakeholders by including a variety of reading materials, literary pieces, and blending of formal grammar with communicative language practices." (p.26).

The current National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI-X) is also aimed towards the building of the human resources, people who have the necessary skills in the English language to work globally in different spheres and study for higher education abroad. So, the national

curriculum wants to use '*English language*' as a vital basis for the fulfilment of the national project− *Vision 2021*− in Bangladesh to make the country a digital one and a country of middle income (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012). Nevertheless, the willingness of the government of Bangladesh failed to achieve the above-mentioned goals as it failed to bring the integrated practice of the four basic skills of a language in the classroom teaching and learning process as well as in the testing system (Shurovi, 2014). Hence, to successfully execute the current education policy of the English language, it is essential to implement CLT successfully. Consequently, to achieve completeness of language learning through CLT, both listening and speaking must be amalgamated into the ELT policy and curriculum, as "the overall goal of the Bangladesh national ELT curriculum is to bring about the communicative competence of the learners" (p.37) and to use English as a tool for education, economy and ICT development of the country (Ali, 2014).

Listening skill in English language education in Bangladesh

As far as the teaching of listening is concerned, listening has not received priority in the language teaching and learning process in Bangladesh till now. Listening, as a set of skills, has been absent from the beginning of the history of English language education in Bangladesh (Kaisar & Khanam, 2008). Listening skill is included in policy recently but denigrated in practice. It is also evidenced in other contexts that throughout the history of language learning, most students have never been taught how to listen for L2 learning (Schmidt, 2016). "While language learners are often taught how to plan and draft a composition or deliver an oral presentation, learners are seldom taught how to approach listening" (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, p. 22). However, the importance of listening comprehension in language learning is significantly germane to L2 learners recently (Brown & Lee, 2015).

Therefore, listening skill is supposed to be included as an integral part of the CLT approach that is mandated in Bangladesh for teaching and learning English. Bangladesh, nevertheless, has no dedicated listening instruction at any level of its mainstream education except for the post-HSC groups preparing for the IELTS exam as they have to face listening as one of the modules in the test. Listening poses an obstacle to the post higher secondary Bangladeshi learners as oral skills are not included in the academic assessment process, and they have to embrace it while taking the IELTS exam. According to the research by Shurovi in 2014, all the teachers pointed to the necessity of listening and speaking skills for the development of

students' English language competence. Abedin, Majlish, and Akter (2010) carried out a survey with post higher secondary learners in Bangladesh that showed that 100% of participants agreed on the necessity of practising listening to understand real-life English and to communicate properly in their academic and non-academic settings. At the same time, 96.15% of participants who were teachers regarded listening skill as a significant channel of language learning and suggested that they should take special care to develop these skills for learner's overall English language proficiency (Abedin et al., 2010). Podder (2011) argued that listening and speaking should be properly practised as young learners were better learners of the language. If the students had proficiency in these skills, they would face fewer language-related problems when they went for higher education or job or immigration abroad.

In this chapter, I have discussed the history of the colonial legacy of the English language and its influence on the education and socio-cultural contexts of Bangladesh. This chapter has also described the position of the English language in teaching and the existing curriculum. The description provides an important foundation for the following chapter, in which I have discussed the research literature that identifies the gap between the policy and practice of listening skill in English language teaching, learning, and assessment at the secondary level.

Chapter Three: Review of Literature

This chapter reviews literature that forms a basis for investigating the overarching question that guides this research: How is the policy of teaching listening in the English language implemented in secondary schools in Bangladesh? It presents an overview of relevant literature related to the policy, classroom teaching, and assessment challenges of listening in English language education in Bangladesh. It also presents the relevant research literature concerning L2 listening. It focuses on existing discussions and research that has been conducted so far in Bangladesh and identified in international literature.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section examines the literature relating to various aspects of the colonial background, disconnected language policy, curriculum, classroom practice, and assessment of oral skills, more specifically listening skill, in both urban and rural contexts in Bangladesh. The second section reports the methodological debate about CLT in teaching and learning English and accounts for its unsatisfactory use and failure to produce the desired outcomes that have been called for in the National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI-X). The third section reviews writings about the importance of listening competence, the process of L2 listening, and the input channels of listening in language learning. The fourth section of the chapter presents the studies related to the aspects of the listening comprehension difficulties that hinder aural comprehension. It then further narrows the focus on those listening comprehension difficulties of the post-secondary students of Bangla-medium in connection to the IELTS listening test. It also reviews the literature on the required skills and strategies related to listening comprehension difficulties. The fifth section illustrates the challenges of teaching listening in the classroom at the secondary level and the contextual obstacles of implementing listening into teaching and assessment procedures. It then discusses two possible interpretations: classroom and non-classroom contexts of listening comprehension. In addition, references have been made to relevant literature throughout Chapters One and Two.

Policy and practice of listening skill for English language education

A language policy may have different aspects at different levels, from the strictly formal level of language planning documents and declarations to informal expressions of political or social intentions. Similar to many post-colonial nations, Bangladesh also tries to ensure English linguistic capital that is available to its school population through significant

pedagogical and policy reforms since the late 1990s. However, the findings recorded in the literature inform that the English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh are not considered to be effective (Alam, 2015; Ali & Walker, 2014; Al Amin, 2017; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Podder, 2013; Rahman & Pandian, 2018). One of the many reasons is the absence of listening in English language education in Bangladesh. I will address this issue by reviewing the literature in the pages that follow.

Rahman et al. (2019) posited that the teaching and testing of the English language must reflect the purpose and objective of both the National Education Policy 2010 and the National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI –X). So, as one of the parts of both the Education policy and curriculum for English language education, listening exercises have been included in textbooks of secondary English language for teaching and assessment to improve students' listening skill for language proficiency (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a). According to the English National Curriculum (2012), one of the goals of teaching English at the secondary level is " to help learners acquire the basic skills of English language for effective communication at different spheres including contemporary workplaces, and higher education" (p.11). However, to date, only a few studies (Abedin et al., 2010; Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Podder, 2013) have been conducted to explore the importance and need for listening skill for English language education and the associated teaching, learning, and assessment problems of it at secondary and higher secondary levels in the Bangladeshi context.

Moreover, Akter (2019) noted that in Bangladesh, listening skill has not been given much importance throughout the whole academic life of a student. Bhattacharja (2018), in a national seminar, complained that students in Bangladesh even do not get the correct input of *Bangla* language let alone the *English* language input. The students from different regions receive the relevant dialectical input of *Bangla* language, such as *Chatgaia*, *Sylheti*, and *Dhakaia* to name a few. Akter (2019) also indicated that the country has no specific language policy-in-Education for either *Bangla* or *English* language. So, according to him, listening to English remains a challenge to students as the students are not socially in contact with the English language input since childhood and that makes it hard for them to understand an oral text in English. In his talk, Bhattacharja (2018) also accentuates the hypothesis of Krashen's *comprehensible input* and related to the context of Bangladesh why the students are weak in English and why there are only a few people in general in Bangladesh who can speak everyday English convincingly. He also highlighted that language is acquired and does not

simply emerge spontaneously in the absence of exposure to speech. Stephen, Renandya, Mason, and Bose (2018) also argued that there are a huge number of people who know a large vocabulary of English and have a good deal of grammar but "have difficulty understanding the spoken text. This is because they lack competence in phonological aspects of the spoken language" (p. 1). A number of studies in Bangladesh also (such as Hossain, 2015) claim several barriers that are responsible for unsuccessful listening to spoken words. These are mainly native accents, lack of vocabulary, culturally unfamiliar topics, lack of familiarity with the pre-listening activities, lack of motivation to listen more and more, and shortage of logistic support for listening practice. However, despite the endeavour to identify the listening comprehension problems, the studies did not focus on why these listening barriers occur or how to deal with these barriers. Some of the abovementioned issues on listening are directly related to the policy of English language education.

Problems in policy and practice of English language education

As discussed earlier, Bangladesh inherited the English language, curriculum, and syllabus from its colonial legacy as it was part of the Indian subcontinent until 1947 and later part of Pakistan until 1971. The purpose and philosophy of colonial curriculum and education in colonies were the "consolidation of British Empire, recruitment of clerks, spreading of English literature, promoting craze for English articles and English textiles, preparing a class of interpreters of English laws, and translating literary masterpieces of Indian religious books into English" (Rather, 2004, p. 26). So, as a result of being a colony for nearly 200 hundred years, it is quite evident that the legacy of the English empire looms over the English language and its curriculum till now (Akther & Siddiqua, 2016).

Moreover, for the evolutionary history of English, Bangladesh is in the outer circle context for English (Kachru, 1985, 1997). In this context, Kachru's (1997) concentric circle model of World Englishes showed three circles of the language named:

Inner circle - Includes the countries where English is spoken as a first language and represents the traditional bases of English.

Outer circle- Mostly British colonies where English has been institutionalized as an additional language.

Expanding circle - Includes the rest of the world where English is taught and used as a foreign language (used in EFL contexts), with more than a billion in China alone.

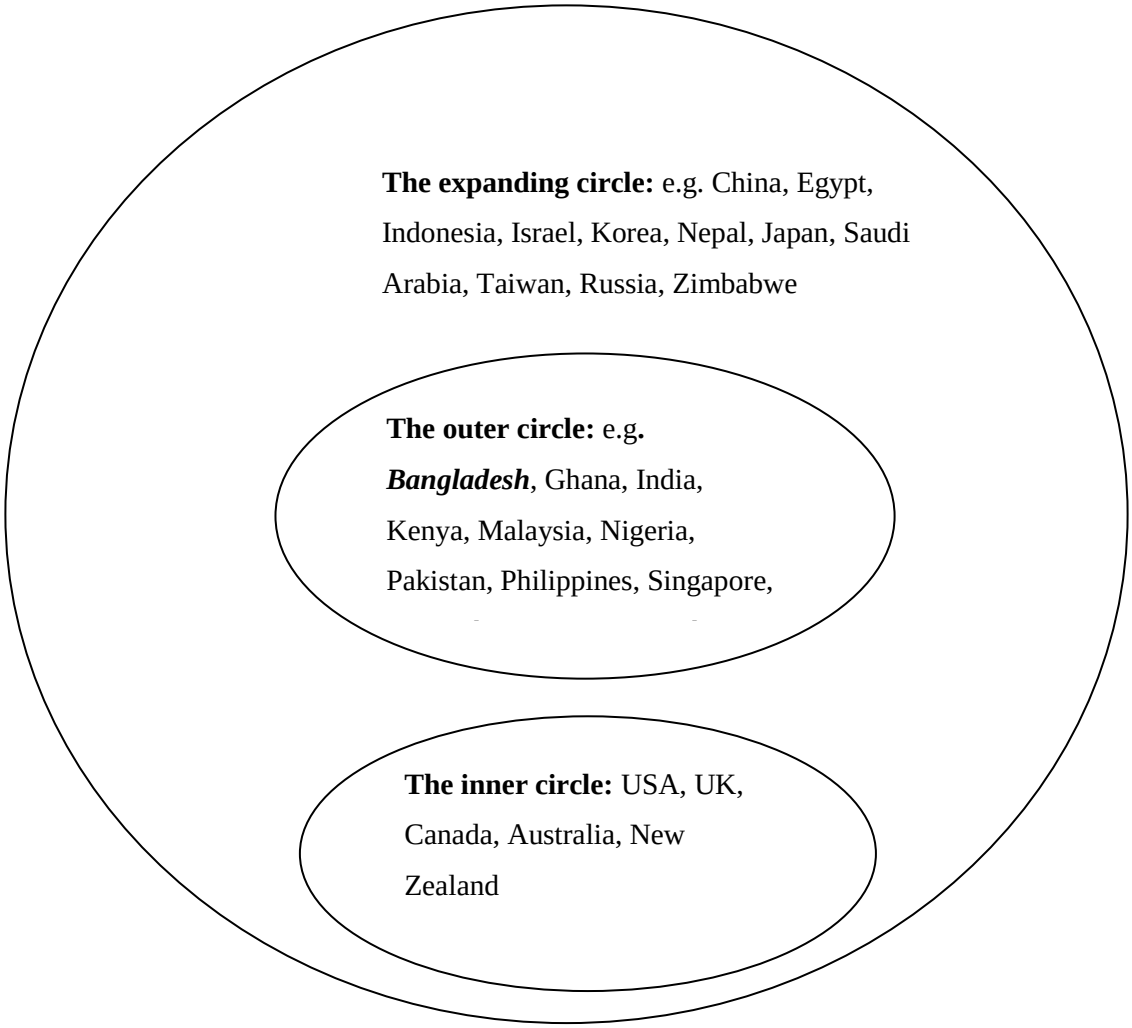

Figure 2. Concentric circle model (Adapted from Kachru, 1997)

Burt (2005) criticises Kachru's "three-circle model" by noting its limitations to reflect the reality of English use. He identified that the model was loosely analysed and the classification among the three circles is unclear. In fact, the three varieties are overlapping, and grey areas exist. Due to the rapid growth of English in many non-native countries, the expanding circle is on increase. In the last few decades, the use of the English language has been accelerated by the impact of globalisation in many South-East Asian countries, such as Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Laos, and Cambodia. The growth of the English language has been augmented as these countries adopted this language as the official *lingua franca* for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) since 2009 (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017). The nations under this regional association have perceived the English language as the gateway to modernisation and globalisation. So, the English language has become the only second language that is taught widely in these countries. These countries, apart from Indonesia, have introduced English as a foreign language from the elementary level and as a language of instruction (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017).

Moreover, due to various needs, the use of English has been widened in different settings. Therefore, the categorisation between the *outer circle* and the *expanding circle* becomes complex. As a result, it is argued that the *Three-circle model* should be revised to a more pragmatic one to represent the actual use of English; instead of categorising the English speakers based on national identity. The revised model can be represented in terms of English proficiency in international and regional varieties. So, further research related to *World Englishes* is required to highlight the rapid and diversified growth of English in a more logical way (Burt, 2005; Kabir, 2018).

The colonial influence is also found in the perception of the Bangladeshi English speakers. They perceive that the correct accent means only British accents. People usually appreciate those speakers who use a British accent in their speaking of the language (Rahman, 1996) although Attanayake (2019) contends that only 18.9% of students were able to speak without shyness or fear in a classroom. Attanayake (2019) also indicates that the rest of the students were fearful or shy to speak in English in a classroom due to their accents. However, the current research on the accent (such as Jenkins, 2006; Kachru, 2008) focuses more on the international *intelligibility* of spoken English as the language has become a language for everyone, rather than on any particular accent, such as British or American accents. In this research, it has become important to investigate the need for improving listening comprehension skills for language proficiency because a language user needs to understand the accents of a wide range of *World Englishes* apart from British or American accents of the English language. So, Kaisar and Khanam (2008) affirm that teaching the practice of listening has become a vital factor in enabling secondary students to develop communicative competence in a global context.

For this reason, Aktuna (1997) claims that language policy as an area of language education research is influenced by multifaceted factors related to the political, economic, social, and linguistic issues of the specific context. Baldauf (2005) contends that language policy and planning are generally comprised of four different components. These are: "status planning (about society), corpus planning (about language), language-in-education (or acquisition) planning and prestige planning (about the image) (p. 957)." Among these four components, "language-in-education" is mainly related to language learning and teaching. So, Islam (2015) claims that this component is more important for the implementation of the National Education Policy 2010 and National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI- X) in terms of its

purpose, activities, and goals of English language education in the Bangladeshi context than other three components of language policy and planning.

The distinction between language planning and language policy is specifically demarcated by Kaplan (2011, p. 925) who defines *language planning* as a visible activity conducted by the government of a nation in order to achieve *"*massive changes in a society*"* or which is *"*intended to promote a systematic linguistic change in some community of speakers*"*. *Language policy*, he stated, is a body of ideas, laws and regulations, rules and practices targeted to achieve planned language changes in the society, group, or system. My study explores how one of the policy-related problems of Bangladesh is the formulation of *top-down* policy without considering the *bottom-up* needs and resources, failing to put English language-in-education policy into practice on the ground. Kheng and Baldauf (2011) posited that to make a language-in-education policy successful, careful consideration of the combination of both top-down and bottom-up planning and practice was essential. Hamid and Erling (2016) argue that although several donor-funded projects such as ELTIP, Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP), and English in Action (EIA) have endeavoured to successfully implement the policies on English language education in Bangladesh, there is limited success in implementing those policies. They also noted that policymakers do not consider critical discourses of English education as well as the financial realities of the context to implement curriculum policies. As a result, ambiguity in policies exists and often fails to connect the realities on the ground leaving English education dysfunctional.

Although a number of studies, such as Nur and Islam (2018) and Das, Shaheen, Shrestha, Rahman, and Khan (2014) have addressed the problems of English language policy and its implementation in Bangladesh, the studies lightly glossed over the disconnections between English language policy and its practice and assessment in secondary English education. The existing body of research reports the disconnections focusing mainly on the policy of English language education and the absence of the assessment of the integration of all four skills in a public examination or in schools, which is proposed in the policy for secondary students. Moreover, these research studies were conducted from teachers' perspectives without recording the policy-makers' viewpoints about those disconnections. Furthermore, existing research does not focus on how to teach and practice oral skills in the classroom and the challenges of teaching oral skills, especially listening skill. This study seeks to fill out some of the research gaps.

Podder (2013) claims that the development of the policy of English language education also faces problems related to poor practices in the teaching of oral skills. Hamid and Erling (2016) noted that oral skills are not assessed in the examination and because teachers and students are exam-driven, only reading and writing based on memorisation are developed. Rahman (2018) reported the inability of teachers to use English in teaching English although this is advised by the CLT approach to language teaching and the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DOSHE), Bangladesh ("ইংরেজি বিষয়ের ক্লাস নিতে হবে ইংরেজিতেই," 2017). Chowdhury and Farooqui (2011) and Nur (2018) argue that teachers lack the necessary training in teaching oral skills of the English language in a classroom. So, although the curriculum for English language education has been revised, the goals cannot be achieved, the researchers argued, if the teaching styles of teachers, the central agents of policy implementation, will not be changed by proper pedagogical training. Talukder and Saba (2016) argue that the integration of ICT in secondary education in Bangladesh was expected to bring a significant change in English language teaching, but has not done so. Although many resources and practice materials related to oral skills of *English for Today* textbook exercises for secondary students are available online, teachers are unable to download those materials to use in the classroom due to the lack of ICT knowledge. Although the research of Podder (2011) highlights the perceptions and attitudes of barriers and enablers for the teachers to assess listening and speaking skills in secondary English teaching, the study has not focused on how to teach English through listening and speaking skills. This study seeks to fill a gap in the teaching of listening to secondary students in Bangladesh.

Moreover, Podder (2011) lightly addressed the perceptions and attitudes of the teachers only in assessing listening and speaking skills but did not examine the attitudes and interests of the students towards the assessment of oral skills. However, there are other implementation challenges in assessing oral skills related to institutional readiness and resource restrictions that need to be addressed. Therefore, to fill a gap in the current policy and practice research in language-in-English education in Bangladesh, the present study has been carried out.

Rittel and Webber (1973) claim that the plurality of objectives due to multiple political viewpoints makes it always difficult to pursue solitary planning to deal with social problems. That is why approaches to problems in social sciences are different from applied sciences. They argue that it would be misleading if social professionals assume that social problems are similar to the problems of applied sciences. So, unlike applied science research problems, social science research problems are not solved but resolved time and again and that is why Rittel and Webber (1973) identify the planning problems and public policy issues as a part of

social problems and label these problems as *wicked problems* that require the development of an exhaustive inventory of all the conceivable re-solutions according to the demand of the issue. So, to formulate a plan or policy concerning wicked problems, the aim is not to find the truth but to improve the features of the relevant context where the people live. That is why, although the discussion about assessing and including oral skills is going on in order to implement policy into practice and assessment, there are several existing *wicked problems* in the Bangladeshi context. Listening and speaking skills have gained a foothold in the English textbooks only recently although they have been in the curriculum since the CLT approach was adopted in 1997 (Islam, 2015).

CLT in curriculum and English textbooks for the secondary students

Richards (2015) explains that CLT as a language teaching method has been in use since the 1960s when the teaching paradigm shifted from the structure and form of language to the meaning and fluency of language. Moreover, with the growing need for learning English all over the world due to globalisation, ELT policy and practices in countries where English is spoken as a second language have been witnessing further pedagogical changes. Canagarajah (2008) and Savignon (2002) noted that among these changes, CLT, as a methodical change from the previously used method, was the most evident methodological change in the spread of the English language. Luk (2008) claimed that the CLT method originated in the western context of the teaching and learning process where it was easy to make the process "learner-centred" with all the needed classroom resources and materials. So, it worked successfully in the West. Later on, it was popularised around the world by the BANA (coined by Holliday in 1994) experts who claimed that the CLT method is the most scientific method to develop language proficiency. This was the core argument to propagate the CLT method "as [the] ideal model in places outside its origin". However, Canagarajah (2008) and Williams (2017) argue that due to differences in social dynamics, educational context, teaching and learning the culture, and lack of classroom resources in non-native countries, especially in Asia, the CLT method did not work properly as the method had no consideration of local needs. Moreover, Williams (2017) claims that traditional "book-centred" pedagogy and assessment, lack of trained teachers, and teaching CLT without oral skills helped pave the way for the dysfunctional CLT approach in many East Asian countries.

In Chapter One, I discussed the emergence and the development of CLT for English language teaching in Bangladesh. Before going any further in this discussion, there is a need to look

into the issues that impede the CLT approach to function effectively in Bangladesh. Although the CLT approach was introduced more than two decades ago, the teachers still dominate the session with an emphasis on the grammar and translation method. The teachers frequently require the students to memorise the grammar rules when learning the English language. Because of the traditional teaching methods and the examination system, the teachers and students scarcely bother to practise the oral skills as there are no marks allocated in the examinations for those skills. Rahman (2019) claims that teachers carry out English teaching without any prior knowledge of CLT or the necessary teaching resources at 98% of secondary schools in the Bangladeshi context. It is also important to note here that Bangladeshi English teachers, particularly secondary English teachers, have a long tradition of teaching English following the GT method that started in the colonial period. Islam (2015) explains that a lack of properly trained teachers is one of the barriers to implement CLT in Bangladesh, as in many other Asian countries. The CLT approach has not been used in the way it should be. Moreover, the teachers had few opportunities to have in-service training. So, teachers were unaware of how to apply CLT in the classroom. However, in his research, Islam did not specify the design and construction of training for listening and speaking skills, in particular. Similarly, the providence of CLT training does not guarantee that it will be implemented in the classroom. Furthermore, Islam (2015) stated that the participants in his research were the teachers only; whereas, the opinions of the policymakers are needed to know the planning and the project outline of the training. Several researchers (Al Amin, 2017; Rahman et al., 2018) further examined issues, such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of sufficient class time resulting in no peer or group discussion, and a traditional teacher-centred classroom that act as the barriers to implementing CLT in Bangladesh.

A cohort of researchers (Alam, 2018; Hasan, 2016) was critical of CLT despite all the physical limitations and pedagogical incompleteness of CLT implementation. They termed CLT as a failed method of teaching English in Bangladesh. In this regard, they raise some issues. One of the issues was the admission test of the Faculty of Arts of the Dhaka University[5] in 2014 when only two students qualified for the admission test and the rest of the test takers failed in English. They linked this issue of the admission test to the prevalent English language teaching situation in our schools and colleges. They then attempted to connect this situation to the condition when GTM was replaced. So, they argued in favour of

[5] The oldest university in Bangladesh. It is often consided as the leading public university in the country.

GTM. They want to bring GTM back again for teaching English at secondary schools. Conversely, Chowdhury (2018) disagrees about this argument. He raises the question related to the validity of the DU admission test as it gives only 60 minutes to answer 100 multiple-choice type questions, whereas at least one minute is allotted on average to answer each question in any international aptitude test comprising MCQs. Chowdhury (2018) further argues that the admission test lacked *construct validity* as it did not comply with Bloom's Taxonomy in terms of assessment questions in the admission test that aligned with the English learning outcomes of the higher secondary students who sat for the admission test. To check the students' ability in English in the admission test in a true sense, there must be questions related to analytical ability, problem-solving, and application skills of the English language rather than testing the reproductive ability through multiple-choice type questions (Chowdhury, 2018). Alam (2018) again argues, based on his anecdotal experience that "CLT, then, has not helped in any perceivable way in improving the English language teaching-learning situation in Bangladesh. Indeed, it might have made matters worse by replacing an age-old method that had been working reasonably well till language policies changed" (p. 253). However, literature based on the history of English learning in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2018; Kabir, 2017) demonstrates that competence in the English language has always been a problem even before the inception of CLT. So, it is relevant to comment that despite the historical legacy of the English language, the lack of competence in the English language in Bangladesh is related to other factors such as the lack of genuine interest in learning the language, even though most of the people know the importance of the language at present (Kabir, 2017). Alam (2018) further criticises the group of language experts and theorists in general through his anecdotal experience: "Finally, I have tried to show how CLT, touted as the panacea to all problems by ELT theorists and experts, failed miserably when applied in Bangladesh" (p. 257). In contrast to Alam (2018), several researchers (Al Amin, 2017; Rasheed, 2017; Rahman & Pandian, 2018) argue that it is not the failure of the CLT as an approach but the way it is implemented often caused unsatisfactory outcomes. In the same vein, Podder (2013) claimed that without the inclusion of oral skills in teaching and assessment practice, the concept of CLT was incomplete and could only be implemented partially. Considering all of this evidence, it seems that methodological efficacy in teaching English is a classic problem in Bangladesh. Therefore, it requires more research to look into the reasons for choosing an effective method of teaching English in the Bangladeshi context and the factors affecting the implementation of CLT in the context.

Despite these implementation barriers, several researchers (Al Amin, 2017; Rahman et al., 2018; Rasheed, 2017) also point out that the conditions for teaching English in urban schools are better than in rural schools. The teachers in urban schools are better at teaching the English language and use a fair amount of English words in comparison to rural teachers who mostly deliver their lectures in *Bangla* language. Although these research findings highlight the barriers to implement the CLT approach in Bangladesh, the issue of teaching and learning English using oral skills is not directly addressed. Moreover, Hamid and Erling (2016) claim that despite growing concerns about the socio-economic divide, the causes of the disparity in urban and rural English language education before and after the CLT have not been changed. Butler (2014) noted that the socio-economic status of the students and their parents was also a barrier in other Asian EFL contexts for English language education. This situation also impacts the communicative competence of English language learners. Al Amin (2017) highlights that

> Compared with rural school students, urban school students have more exposure to an English environment. While students from city schools and colleges are exposed to English languages in various forms like using the internet, watching movies and English programs, playing games on the computer and also participating in various activities like debates and English language clubs, students in the rural areas do not have these opportunities (p. 232).

Moreover, Islam (2015) claims that prevalent training on the CLT approach is largely bureaucratic. He argues that the availability of CLT resources and skilled teachers should be equally available in peripheral areas rather than concentrated in the central parts of the country. However, there were fewer trained teachers and insufficient resources existed in the remote areas of the country.

Now the question arises (discussed in Chapter Five) whether it is necessary to mix the CLT approach with previous methods that involved grammar, translation and the study of literature, or whether it is still possible to implement CLT fully with an integration of the four core skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Alternatively, it is time to embrace one of the several extensions of CLT such as Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Moore, 2018). I mentioned earlier that the National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI-X) suggests adopting an *eclectic*[6] approach to English language teaching in the context of Bangladesh as

[6] Eclectic approach combines different methods and approaches to teach a language depending on the aims of

there is no single ‘universal’ or ‘best way’ and a particular approach may be more effective in a certain situation than other to teach a language (Mwanza, 2017). However, the country has still not been able to implement a complete package of a language teaching method.

Butler (2011) noted that the problem of disconnections between policy and practice is not available in the context of Bangladesh only; it also prevails in other parts of East Asia as well. The disconnection between policy and practice is significant in deterring the development of oral skills in learning English.

Oral skills are ignored

Rahman et al. (2018) report that the skills of oracy (listening and speaking) are insignificant in the test format of secondary English education, although their inclusion was in the proposal of the curriculum and has been included in the secondary textbooks since 2015. As a result, the examination format of the secondary level faced valid criticism in regard to its lack of support for the implementation of a CLT approach. Islam (2015) and Rahman et al. (2018) claim that there is no substantial change in terms of communicative language teaching as the existing assessment system heavily focuses on the written items only without any oral test. So, by ignoring listening and speaking as oral skills, it is hard to develop communicative competence in the English language to use widely for many practical needs. All the projects (such as ELTIP, EIA, and TQI) that have been run so far in the country equally emphasised language skills in four areas simultaneously: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, they faced challenges to align with the secondary English language curriculum due to the absence of oral skills both in classroom teaching and assessment. Hence, Das et al. (2014) posit that there is a necessity of investigating the barriers to align the concurrent goals of the curriculum, textbooks, and the assessment system. The research of Das et al. (2014) also explains that as listening and speaking skills are not assessed and bear no marks in the examination, teachers concentrate only on teaching the syllabus of reading and writing activities that are assessed in the examination.

Moreover, the research of Das et al. (2014) argues that existing assessment that ignores listening and speaking push the students to be rote learners to pass the written examination. Das et al. (2014) noted that the Ministry of Education in 2004 introduced school-based assessment (SBA) for 30% of the assessment with attention to six relevant competencies – thinking, probing, personality, communications, cooperation and socialisation − leaving the

the lessons and the abilities of the learners.

remaining 70% of the total marks to be achieved in the public examination (SSC) for the secondary students. However, this policy has not functioned at school so far and Das et al. (2014) report that a group of participating teachers in their study suggested that listening and speaking could be assessed in schools and added to the marks of the public exam on English papers.

Richards (2015) and Rost (2016) identify a situation where after completing 10 to 12 years of studying English at school, most of the students fail to achieve the desired proficiency in the English language. So, to develop communicative competence, the researchers argue that a student first needs to develop the listening skill to be competent in speaking skill to be able to make meaningful oral communication. As the current study mainly focuses on the necessity of listening for English language proficiency in Bangladesh, the following section describes the literature on listening skill in policy and practice.

Fluency in listening for oral communication and language comprehension

Hearing is an aural ability, while listening is a skill (Rost, 2016). Listening is, thus, a creative activity that can be interpreted and described. According to many philosophers and anthropologists over the millennia who have focused on human development, the processing of spoken language is the most intricate of all human behaviours (Rost, 2016; Sherwood, Subaiul, & Zawidzki, 2008). The reason is related to its neuropsychological and socio-linguistic aspects. While processing language through listening at a given moment, a person has to engage in different tasks simultaneously, such as speaking, interpretation of contextual cues, comprehension, and formulation of a response. To accomplish these simultaneous tasks, a range of individual component skills are required. Multiple areas of the brain, attentional readiness, and coordination of functional neural circuits are needed at once (Rost, 2016). Recent research in neurophysiology is seeking an overall understanding of these issues and the intra-connections of neural circuits for efficient language processing (Stout & Chaminade, 2012). Moreover, “meanings of verbal language are shaped by context and constructed by the listener through the act of interpreting meaning rather than receiving it intact” (Lynch & Mendelsohn, 2002, p. 194). Even “learning to speak a language begins with comprehension” (Richards, 2015, p. 370) and comprehension comes from listening to that language. Moreover, Rost and Wilson (2013) noted that active listening is more important than passive listening to improve the process of listening. When one actively listens to anything, s/he listens only to relevant information and can think about that in a much deeper way during the

listening. This deeper way of thinking while listening ensures that one learns more efficiently and effectively. Rost (2016) and Saville-Troike (2012) argue that in the basic sequence for the learning of any language, oral skills normally precede orthographic skills. When anyone asks someone "Do you speak English?" then a person intends to mean whether the person can "carry on a conversation reasonably competently" (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 345). Listening is perhaps the most important skill for any effective communication that was first mentioned by Rankin in 1926 (as cited in Brown, 1987). Research has also denoted that adults use 40-50% of their total communication time for listening, and the efficacy of listening in language learning has not been investigated hitherto properly (Prashene, 2016; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). It is learned first, mostly used (45%) by anyone for communication but taught least (Renukadevi, 2014). So, 45% of the total time, a language user is occupied by listening for his/her everyday communication, which is significantly more than speaking (30%), reading (16%), and writing (9%) respectively (Ahmed, 2015); yet both the teachers and students often failed to focus on listening skill to the extent required for attention. Moreover, Brown (2011) suggests that interaction among the students after listening to a lecture increased language learning.

Language experts have grouped listening and reading together, naming them receptive skills; however, there is a huge difference between receiving some information through reading and listening. For example, we can get an idea or gist of a text by skimming but we cannot do the same for listening as it happens in real-time (Brown, 2011) and "cognates are not as available for use in listening as they are in reading, because though they look alike on paper, they sound different when pronounced" (p. 7). Moreover, learners grasp the meanings of words in a text the same way they learn those words in a dictionary; however, they flounder over those words when they are assimilated or pronounced (Brown, 2011). In this regard, Song (2008) claims that listening and reading share the comprehension process; however, the path to comprehension or decoding varies between them. Listening, by nature, is ephemeral if not repeated, and the decoder has to comprehend and infer the meaning at once. On the other hand, while decoding reading materials, one can go back and forth to decipher the meaning. So, a listener cannot rewind the oral text, but a reader can refer back to an orthographic text to clarify understanding (Kurita, 2012).

In recent years, listening has also been examined in relation not only to comprehension but also to language learning. Furthermore, research has recognised the role of listening by affirming that better listening comprehension precedes production and leads to reflection on

the learning of L2 rules (Cook, 2016). Moreover, listening to anything in the target language improves the psychomotor skills of coping with that language quickly (Lynch, 2012). Psychomotor skills have a direct relationship with decoding and comprehension of listening although very little research has looked into this issue (Leonard, 2019). So, to make an effective interaction, it is very important to decode the speaking text properly. Hence, Ellis (2000) asserts, "learning arises not through interaction, but in interaction" (as cited in Walsh, 2011, p. 51). To have competence in any language, Krashen's (1985) *input hypothesis* pointed out that learners' should be ensured *comprehensible input* or the aural reception of the second language in a "sufficient amount" for L2 acquisition. Long (1996), in his *interaction hypothesis,* also promotes comprehensible input by saying that taking part in conversation can facilitate more input depending on *intake* capacity. However, Schmidt (2010) contends that the input does not convert into intake unless it is noticed or paid attention to as "*noticing* is the necessary and sufficient condition for the conversion of input into the intake for learning" (Schmidt, 1993, p. 209).

Being a "lingua franca", English has gained a unitary position in the world as a language. This status helps promote the importance of listening skill in this language. Moreover, Renandya and Hu (2018) argue that "Effective L2 listening is a twenty-first-century language skill that is indispensable for effective communication and mutual understanding and has a vital role to play in enhancing the quality of life, creating new opportunities and alternatives" (p. 48). For this reason, the listening skill requires proper pedagogical choreography. Furthermore, English as a vehicular language, in this globalised society, in terms of communication, has connected myriads of cross-cultural relations across the world. As a result, varieties of demographic accents of English emerged with a focus on the international intelligibility of the language defying the aspirations to have native-like accents (Tergujeff, 2013) as "intelligibility must come first" (Cunningham, 2009, p. 126) and a learner has to understand different accents of as many varieties of speakers of English as possible rather than to understand only native speakers of English. Macaulay (1988) also claimed that many learners desired only to follow RP (Received Pronunciation) of British English for their learning of English as a first or second language. However, it was inappropriate as they might not be familiar with a variety of other accents. They might sound unreasonable while communicating to mass people if they follow the accent of RP that was spoken only by the limited number of people in England, whereas, the majority of the people of England spoke to the standard and intelligible accent of English (Burt, 2005; Jenkins, 2002).

Macaulay (1988) further urged (everyone, regardless of whether they were linguists, phoneticians, and teachers) to rationalize the obsession with the accent of the elite minority rather than the accent of the mass. According to Jenkins, "Native speakers of English generally are monolingual and are not very good at tuning into language variation" (as cited in Morrison, 2016, p. 3). Therefore, at present, apart from the two dominant variety of accents: British and American, we need to understand other varieties of standard and intelligible pronunciation of English (such as Australian, New Zealand, Indian, Caribbean, African, and Arabian accents of English) through listening to understand and communicate with people globally, as Kachru (1988) mentions that all the users of the English language are the owners of this language (as cited in Hamid & Baldauf, 2013, p. 477).

Furthermore, the English language curriculum in EFL or ESL countries is hugely biased toward the skills of literacies than the skills of oracy (Renandya and Hu, 2018). As a result, the interface between receptive skills and productive skills for language learning is still not understood properly (Bano, 2017). This bias again leads listening skill to remain unfocused, rather than being the core language skill to be learned first to master a language in comparison to the other three language skills (Reading, Writing, and Speaking) (Deveci, 2018; Ulum, 2015; Walker, 2014). Moreover, Brown (2011) claims, "Researchers and classroom teachers tend to assume that listening will develop as proficiency increases" (p. ix). This is one of the main reasons for listening as a skill being under-researched, as it has been assumed as a passive process in the research paradigm of second language acquisition. Due to these reasons, among all the four skills, listening skill remains the most difficult skill to teach to the EFL or ESL learners (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Sejdiu, 2018; Walker, 2014).

Lindsay and Knight (2006) discuss how we always listen to a variety of things in our daily life, for example:

> what someone says during a conversation, face to face or on the telephone; announcements giving information, for example, at an airport or railway station; the weather forecast on the radio; a play on the radio; music; someone else's conversation (eavesdropping); a lecture; professional advice, for example, at the doctor's, in the bank; instructions, for example, on how to use a photocopier or other machinery; directions; a taped dialogue in class (p. 45).

Nevertheless, “while language learners are often taught how to plan and draft a composition or deliver an oral presentation, learners are seldom taught how to approach listening or how to manage their listening when attending to spoken texts or messages” (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, p. 22).

That is why, being one of the receptive language skills, listening is harder to teach, test and research than speaking and writing, like reading, the involvement of the mind of the language user and most of the comprehension process happen internally to the person (Badger & Xiaobiao, 2006).

Teaching methods put emphasis on written language more than on spoken language, although the existence of this form of language is about 150,000 years and came much earlier than written language (Mcwhorter, 2013). There can be no effective oral communication without listening. According to Ting (2013), “the cultivation of listening and speaking ability can contribute to consolidate the learned language knowledge and improve the reading and writing ability” (p. 2). For this reason, Brown and Lee (2015) argue that as a part of receptive skills, “listening” has been emphasised as we produce language by internalising linguistic information. Schmidt (1990) notes that listening with attention helps to understand the language better, which is of foremost importance for learning through language input, which means that comprehension precedes production. In this context, Krashen (1985) explains that speaking is a result of an acquisition.

Ting (2013) further adds, “the speaking ability can be cultivated and improved on the basis of listening.” Therefore, to conduct a meaningful conversation, we have to understand the speaker first and then reply accordingly. Brown and Lee (2015) note that at present, concerted attention has been given to listening comprehension by the language-teaching professionals, and the main crux is that learners can increase their overall language competence of L2 in collaboration with other students through listening comprehension tasks. Brown and Lee (2015) also added that the more the learners are aurally exposed to a target language, the more competent they would be in that language. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) put the emphasis on listening practice from product to process and make learners more responsible than teachers to become self-regulated learners. So, effective listening is not only important for language learning but also essential for developing relationships between students and their instructor, resulting in better learning performance (Duck & McMahan, 2017). Deveci (2018) further emphasises that active listening is also a definite need for

students to develop social skills during their study life. The following section highlights the process of L2 listening.

L2 listening process

The construct of second language listening ability is always complex. There are various channels of language, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This section focuses on the comprehension of listening. Several research studies (Buck, 2001; Field, 2008b; Rost, 2016; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012) on listening skill have shown that L2 listening is a multidimensional process linked to the neural, social, cognitive, and metacognitive processes that require both psychological and sociological perspectives in language use. The moment people meet and start to exchange thoughts, feelings, and information, listening becomes indispensable.

In listening comprehension, the meaning is not directly found in the spoken text but is constructed by the listener using linguistic knowledge, the co-text, the context of the situation, and general background or topic-specific knowledge. One of the challenges for L2 listening researchers is to identify listening strategies that seem to be the features of a fluent L2 listener. Field (2008b) argues that the use of listening strategies occurs not only in "the use of contextual and co-textual 'top-down' information in order to solve local difficulties of comprehension" (p. 108) but also at various lexical levels, specifically when listeners are unsure about the reliability of what has been understood, leading them to use the most likely word match despite the *context* and *co-text*. A *context* works as a source of information on which a second language listener can draw. It is a situation, background knowledge, and the topic of the text in which a word or passage appears and which helps the listener ascertain its meaning. Often, listeners rely on contextual clues to decipher the meaning when they fail to decode the whole spoken text. They may come up with a wrong interpretation of the spoken text. Another major factor is the *co-text*, the surrounding of a set of words in a written expression connected linguistically that influences listening comprehension because of the meaning interpretation of a spoken text. Based on this notion, one can conclude that reliance more on *context* to understand the spoken text can be very costly as the listener will be more busy getting the literal meaning of the spoken text than the intended meaning of the speaker. On the other hand, the understanding of *co-text* provides the long-term key to skilled listening, just as it does to skilled reading since it frees attention that can then be focused on the speaker's intended meaning in a specific context (Field, 2008b).

Therefore, Graham (2017) explains that understanding from listening occurs at three levels: intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability. These three levels of listening are different from one another in terms of understandability. Thus, *intelligibility* refers to when a listener identifies the words correctly they usually hear by correct decoding of the spoken text, *comprehensibility* refers to the ability of the listener to recognize the meaning of words or utterances in context, and *interpretability* refers to the ability of the listener to perceive the speaker's intentions or inner sense. So, as listening skill precedes speaking skill and the study focuses on listening skill for English language education, I examine studies about the comprehension difficulties in listening skill in the following section.

Major difficulties in listening comprehension

A number of researchers (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Rost, 2016) have acknowledged that four types of overarching components are required to comprehend oral texts: 1. Phonological (the sound system) 2. Syntactic (how words are put together) 3. Semantic (relationship of sound-word and prepositional knowledge) and 4. Pragmatic (the meaning of utterances in a particular context). These four types of components of speech reception involve several features in the process of comprehension. Buck (2001) accentuates numerous difficulties encountered in listening tasks, such as unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, fast speech rates, and unfamiliar accents. Renandya and Hu (2018) further make a list of 10 issues that cause listening comprehension most difficult for L2 students. These are complex sentences, phonetic variations, missing subsequent information, speaker accent, news broadcast, long sentences, background noise, catching the details, fast speed, and new words. However, Akter (2019) argues that due to the negligence of both teachers and learners, students lag to improve their listening comprehension in the Bangladeshi context. Theorists of listening for language education have highlighted different issues, skills, and strategies to deal with the difficulties of listening comprehension. I intend to discuss these issues below.

Phonological aspects of listening comprehension

Jenkins (2000) claims that 60% of breakdowns in communication occur due to pronunciation problems. However, the issue of pronunciation is still neglected in improving listening comprehension and is still treated as the "Cinderella of Language Teaching". She further notes that phonological competence is often related to comprehending the sound system and pronunciation of oral speech. It is also related to the accent and intelligibility of a language. Cauldwell (2013) explains that phonological knowledge is a means to facilitate the problems

related to accent and intelligibility encountered by L2 learners while listening to a flow of speech. Marza (2014) argues that to generate communication that is mutually intelligible and comprehensible; the issue of pronunciation played a crucial role in listening. However, Grant (2014) states that while the lack of understanding of speech for intelligibility is often blamed on its speaker, intelligibility is a two-way process between the listener and speaker.

Nevertheless, Kaisar and Khanam (2008) report that listening is a problem for Bangladeshi learners. Students are unable to correctly understand English words, accents, and pronunciation when interacting with foreigners − and often, students in Bangladesh could not even understand their teachers' English lectures. However, researching undergraduate students, Zarin (2013) argues that students would understand the English of their Bangla-speaking teachers when they delivered a lecture in English but failed to understand the oral text from a mouth of a native speaker. It was difficult for the students because they were not used to listening to the speeches in their native language neither in a classroom nor real-life situations. Gant (2014) claims that listening is often facilitated by a familiar topic of discussion or by familiarity with the accent of the speaker.

Begum and Hoque (2016) highlight that the students at the tertiary level face listening problems due to their ignorance of pronunciation features such as elision, stress, and intonation. These features again help the listeners to deal with functional words differently than the content words from a spoken text, as is repeatedly found in research (Field, 2008b). Therefore, it is arguable that if tertiary students were not familiar with these features of listening skill, there was less chance that secondary students would know about these features. So, there is a need to know about the listening problems of the secondary students related to these features of pronunciation. Kaisar and Khanam (2008) report that the Bangladeshi IELTS test-takers perform poorly in the IELTS listening test scoring lower than the other three skills of the language test. Nonetheless, very little research has been done so far to understand the problems of the phonological features of Bangladeshi students, although Grant (2014) argues that familiarity with both segmental, suprasegmental aspects and the phonological features leverage intelligibility of listening comprehension for unbroken communication. This study attempts to address some of these research gaps.

Syntactic and semantic aspects of listening comprehension

Knowledge of syntactic and semantic features of oral texts is different from those of written texts. Bassetti and Atkinson (2015) explain that the disconnection between phono-

orthographic representations of the same word often creates trouble for the listeners. Brown (2011) explains that recognition of a word in spoken discourse is a major difficulty in listening as many English words do not maintain phoneme-grapheme correspondence. Rost (2016) highlights that word recognition is not only the core of spoken language comprehension but also an important aspect of the development of automaticity of L2 acquisition. He notes that the majority of content words in English which is almost 90% have stress on the first syllable; as a result, a proficient listener can use *stress* as a signpost to recognise the beginning of a new word. Nation (2001) also suggests that in order to predict unknown words from a text, a learner is needed 95% of the words for plausible comprehension of the text. Graham (2017) claims that differently by saying that the percentage of guessing the "keywords" correctly in listening for transactional information can be less if a learner does not have sufficient vocabulary knowledge.

Flowerdew, Miller, and Li (2000) and Hasan (2000) further extend this notion by saying that students get stuck in their listening comprehension due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge, including specialist vocabulary. So, Williams (2017) suggests that teaching vocabulary as "phrasal chunks" could facilitate learners to learn common expressions and collocations of the English language as a single unit, rather than teaching a "word" in isolation. However, in the context of Bangladesh, few research studies have been done so far in connection to vocabulary and listening skill to improve communicative competence in English at the secondary level. Nonetheless, the research of Jahan and Jahan (2011) in the tertiary context of English education highlight that a low range of vocabulary caused a comprehension barrier to 86.7% of the participants while comprehending spoken and written texts through aural input as well as reading. However, their study did not recommend any pedagogical techniques to teach vocabulary either for better listening comprehension or vocabulary learning by listening practice.

As far as the pragmatics of listening is concerned, Brown (2011) reports that students require the practice of listening between the lines as people do not always utter exactly and clearly, what they mean. Furthermore, he argues that listeners have to fix their purpose for listening whether they listen for the main idea, details for the idea, or inference of the text. Students also have to recognise cohesive devices like transition words (so, thus, next, etc.) while listening. In this regard, background knowledge or schema is important for listening comprehension. Rost (2016) explains that *background knowledge* is a specific sub-set of knowledge (such as world facts or previous events that an individual knows) needed to

comprehend to connect with a particular situation, lesson, or text. To perform all these activities, a listener requires a set of skills and strategies that I intend to discuss below.

Micro and macro skills of listening comprehension

Over the past decade, listening has gained general acceptance as an area of concern for speech and English language educators. Nonetheless, Caruso, Gadd Colombi, and Tebbit (2017) state that very little research is available to the student on this subject. In a pioneering article, Richards (1983) has designed an elaborated taxonomy of aural skills that has been termed micro-skills – comprised of two types of listening settings. Firstly, micro-skills for conversational listening (such as the ability to retain chunks of a language of different lengths for short periods, the ability to recognise reduced forms of words, and the ability to recognise cohesive devices in spoken discourse), and secondly, micro-skills for academic listening (such as the ability to identify purpose and scope of lecture, ability to infer relationships, its cause, effect, and conclusion, and ability to recognise key lexical items related to a subject or topic). Brown and Lee (2015) have modified Richard's "original micro-skills into a list of micro and macro skills" (p. 326) and provided a new taxonomy of listening comprehension grouping ten elements for *micro-skills* and seven elements for *macro-skills*. According to Brown and Lee (2015), bottom-up strategies come under mi*cro-skills* of listening, while top-down strategies are akin to *macro skills* of listening. Richards (2008) suggests that for better comprehension of a spoken script in real-world listening, a combination of both bottom-up and top-down listening strategies is required.

Vandergrift and Goh (2012) argue that there are different phases in listening comprehension. In the *perception phase*, the listeners do the decoding of incoming speech phonetically. Decoding is a process that separates the sound into meaningful units in the spoken text. In the *parsing phase*, the listener analyses the phonetics from memory and uses them to begin the triggering of possible words based on the listeners' level of language skills. In these two phases, bottom-up strategies actively participate in listening comprehension. In the *utilisation phase*, the listener establishes a conceptual framework that fits in the sound stream by referring to its meaning and previous knowledge. Top-down processing (for example, the application of context and prior knowledge to interpret the message) is required in this *utilisation phase* as prior knowledge is saved and recalled from the long-term memory to comprehend the sound stream. Both the researchers, Richard (2008) and Vandergrift and Goh (2012), claim that neither of the processing alone is enough to comprehend successful

listening; rather there is a need for a cohort of both bottom-up and top-down processing for successful listening comprehension. Ma (2009) also accentuates that the students who participated in her research faced more problems with listening as they followed the bottom-up strategies, "I have to understand every word; if I miss something, I feel I'm failing and get worried and stressed" (p. 126). Ma (2009) further mentioned that the students of the experimental group who were taught to apply top-down strategies, such as using background knowledge of the situation, by an 18-week BST instruction program, performed better than the control group for their listening. Brown (2011) posits that a fluent listener possesses both top-down and bottom-up skills of listening, and less-fluent listeners depend mostly on bottom-up listening comprehension skills.

Listening strategies: Cognitive and metacognitive factors

Empirical studies of Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) and Vandergrift (2013) have identified that there is a positive relationship between listening proficiency and the use of strategy. Phakiti (2016) suggests that there is an agreement that the use of strategy is an important element of consciousness and awareness that takes place within the working memory. However, Field (2008b) and Vandergrift (2013) note that the teaching of explicit listening strategies for better listening comprehension or listening benefits remains inconclusive. Bachman and Palmer (1996) argue that metacognition leads to the use of a metacognitive strategy that helps manage other cognitive processes to complete tasks. Separate strategies have been identified for cognition and metacognition to have listening comprehension. Cognitive strategies are those mental activities that help store inputs in working memory or long-term memory for comprehension. Metacognitive strategies are those mental activities that help perform an executive function to manage cognitive strategies for comprehension (Vandergrift & Goh, 2009). Low-skilled listeners rely more on cognitive strategies while skilled listeners use more meta-cognitive strategies along with the cognitive strategies during listening to a spoken text. In general, skilled L2 listeners combine various strategies in an orchestrated and harmonious manner (Vandergrift & Goh, 2009).

Memory factors in listening comprehension

Richards (2015) explains that there are mainly two types of memories for listening comprehension − working memory or short-term memory and long-term memory. Working memory and long-time memory help store information in raw spoken texts and hold a phonological representation. As hearing does not mean listening, a message enters the

sensory memory where it is saved as it is for about a second. Meanwhile, the brain identifies it from other noises as something else. The brain recognises words of the language and connects them. After that, the brain either passes the inputs to the short-term memory or erases them if required based on the quality, necessity, and source of the sound. The short-term memory keeps being analysed against the existing schema of the listener for a brief time. Since the message has been perceived in a different way than the other information, it is retained in the long-term memory. Vandergrift and Goh (2009) claim that in the cognitive aspect of listening, the mechanisms of the mind, speech recognition, and memory play a vital role.

The challenges of teaching and assessing listening skill in secondary classrooms

The teaching of listening has become an important issue in second language classrooms. In this section, I discuss literature about the challenges of teaching listening as there are several factors related to listening comprehension discussed in the preceding paragraphs. I also discuss the assessment challenges of listening. Generally, the purpose of the listening test and the context of language use will guide the construct definition (Buck, 2001).

Richards (2015) suggests that similar to the evaluation of other language skills, the assessment of listening should also consist of both summative and formative assessments to test both the achievement and to monitor the progress of the students for further improvement. Brown (2011) also argues that the focus on listening practice and assessment is not on the *process of listening*[7] but rather on the *product of listening*[8] which means a test of listening, not the teaching of listening for language learning purposes. Most of the time, listening instruction emphasises the importance of practice in achieving comprehension. Students are presented with text after text in the hope that extended exposure might improve listening comprehension with little or no analysis of how this comprehension is achieved. This method is called the *product approach* to listening (Nemtchinova, 2013; Richards, 2015). Conversely, the *process of listening* highlights the fact that, rather than simply taking the information in and getting the meaning out, listeners process input to create meaning from the incoming sounds and their knowledge of the world. The *process of listening* treats

[7] The process approach refers to a psychological model of the mental processes, skills, and strategies that undergird skilled listening.

[8] The product approach to listening refers to the teaching of listening comprehension with an emphasis on the outcome of listening only, that is, the correct answer to comprehension questions.

listening as an active process that functions through a complex interaction of cognitive, affective, and social variables to ensure reception, processing, and understanding of a spoken message (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). The teaching of listening goes through this procedure using different types of *cognitive*, *meta-cognitive,* and *Social/Affective* strategies. Teachers are also required to teach different types of micro and macro skills for better listening comprehension. They can teach these skills following two processing: bottom-up and top-down. The teaching of the process again depends on the competency level and efficiency of the students in listening (Richards, 2015).

In the Bangladeshi context, Researchers (Podder, 2011; Rahman et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2018) expounded that there are multiple challenges in teaching and assessing listening skill in Bangladesh, ranging from teachers' inefficiency, traditional mindset, exam driven language education, lack of teachers' training on oral skills, resource-restrictions for listening practice at secondary schools, especially in rural areas. Researchers have identified some of the challenges of teaching and assessing listening in the Bangladeshi context. However, they have not provided any specific teaching guidelines to teach and assess listening comprehension skills. Therefore, there is a scarcity of research on how to teach listening for English language proficiency to secondary students in Bangladesh. In this regard, this study identifies some of the gaps that exist in research and seeks to fill out those gaps.

Apart from these challenges, another tension looms over the process of assessment. There may raise a tension called the "fairness issue" in the context of Bangladesh during an assessment (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018). Butler (2011) also reports that in many parts of Asia, assessing listening and speaking skills in an academic setting is an unfair process. This study examines this issue of unfairness in the assessment of oral skills in the context of Bangladesh.

It has been mentioned earlier that teaching and assessment of listening are not functioning formally in the country. So, the secondary students who prepare themselves for the IELTS test encounter both the teaching and assessment of listening after their secondary education. The British Council (2016) and Kabir (2018) note that the IELTS test has become one of the most widely accepted and acclaimed ESL language proficiency tests across the world. At present, the test is conducted at hundreds of local centres in a hundred and thirty countries around the world. Jones (2015) observed that more than 2.2 million people took the IELTS test in 2015, a dramatic increase from about forty thousand IELTS test takers twenty years ago in 1995. Kar (2013) claims that the number of IELTS test takers is on the increase in

Bangladesh because students seek to access their higher education and employment around the globe. Secondary students are assessed for only reading and writing skills at their school; whereas, the IELTS test assesses all four skills − reading, writing, speaking, and listening. So, the IELTS listening test is a challenge for the Bangladeshi secondary school leavers who prepare them for the test. It is the unfamiliarity with the assessment of listening while learning English in their schooling that creates the challenge. However, the emergence of ICT has facilitated both listening practice and assessment. I discuss the role of ICT in listening practice in the following section.

Using ICT to provide more listening practice with authentic materials

Palak (2019) reports that more than 120 companies in Bangladesh export information and communications technology (ICT) products worth nearly $1 billion to 35 countries. By 2021, Bangladesh expects its ICT exports to be worth $5 billion. Indeed, the growing strength of the ICT Industry underpins the four vital pillars that will support Bangladesh's transformation to a digital economy by 2021, and a knowledge economy by 2041. By 2030, Bangladesh will be the 24th largest economy. ICT is driving that growth.

Therefore, the government of Bangladesh officially recognised the importance of ICT to transform the country into a digital country by reformulating its education sector, among other major areas of implementation (Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology Bangladesh, 2009). The Asian Development Bank (2017) reports that the government in Bangladesh framed ICT-based Education projects. One of the projects involved ICT training for teachers, and technical support for teachers, such as internet connectivity, computer labs, and digital content for both urban and rural areas. The education project also developed a content-sharing website for the teachers named "শিক্ষক বাতায়ন" [Shikkhok Batayon]. Sultana and Haque (2018) claim that this website created scope for the teachers to share their own created digital content with other teachers across the country. Babu and Nath (2017) point out that the government initiated another web-based platform named "*www.ebook.gov.bd*" where a digital version of all textbooks is available. Currently, the books are stored in PDF format.

Notwithstanding, Sultana and Haque (2018) claim that the issue of ICT training for teachers has been problematic and raised several issues. The issues were related to the ICT policy of the government since 2007 to update the teachers with digital knowledge and to underpin communicative English language practice in a classroom. Although the research of Al Amin

(2017) argues that urban students get extra exposure to English language input, he did not focus in detail on how English teachers could use the limited resources available online for the teaching of listening and speaking to the rural students. Khan, Hadi, and Ashraf (2013) claim that because of the availability of the internet and computers to students of rural schools, the possibility of using online resources prescribed by NCTB for practising listening is on the increase. So, the scope of minimising the urban-rural divide in communicative teaching and learning of English has been increased. However, Khan et al. (2013) note that until teachers have been trained to use online materials and multimedia courseware, they would not be able to free themselves from the traditional teaching method for English education. Anwaruddin (2015) states that another product of ICT, the mobile phone, has become a device to increase English language input and so decrease the gap between urban and rural students in terms of English language exposure. BBC Janala, an approach run by the EIA project since 2009, uses mobile phones as a low-cost educational technology to provide short audio lessons and text-message quizzes to any subscriber of one of six mobile phone providers in Bangladesh. The organiser claims:

> It is the largest, multiplatform innovation to improve basic English language skills anywhere in the developing world. Anybody possessing a mobile phone may have access to this multiplatform language learning service. By dialing 3000 from any mobile phone, a user can learn English lessons such as Essential English, Pronunciation, or English for Work. BBC Media Action and all six mobile phone providers have agreed to charge a reduced tariff for this language learning service (BBC Janala, 2009, p. 55).

Sultana and Haque (2018) argue that teaching various lessons through multimedia-supported technologies helps drill language items and enabled both collaborative and communicative learning. In another study, Ahmed and Kabir (2018) claim that Bangladesh is one of the fastest mobile penetrating countries, and young students are very willing to accept m-learning through mobile phones. However, their research focuses on network preferences and mobile phone habits with university students' general usage patterns but does not examine the use of mobile phones for academic purposes by the students. Kabir (2017) reports that while working with ICT tools to equip rural students in Bangladesh, some of the enduring challenges include unavailability of uninterrupted electricity supply, poor network backbone, high internet access costs, financial limitations to procure sufficient number and type of ICT

equipment, and a lack of required number of technical support employees act as the major barriers.

Furthermore, Anwaruddin (2015) points out that although ICT is a kind of technical support to facilitate teaching and learning, ICT products do not automatically guarantee successful teaching and learning, as teachers are the main driving force to make students' learning happen. Therefore, teachers need proper training to understand how the combination of content, pedagogy, and technology works to facilitate the process of learning for the students. Therefore, teachers' training schemes should develop teachers' critical consciousness so that teachers themselves can teach students to know how to reflect on their own "*world*" and take action to transform it (Freire, 1970, 1973). I have already discussed in Chapter One, that the National Curriculum for English (VI-X) has identified the importance of oral skills of English in classroom teaching and learning. However, there are differences in the purpose of the classroom and non-classroom listening comprehension and competence.

Difference between the classroom and non-classroom listening

Researchers have identified a difference between classroom listening comprehension and listening in non-classroom situations. Brown (2011) reports that the act of listening can be situated in both classroom and non-classroom contexts (usually societal contexts) where the situations are different. The classroom context of listening may include examples of listening text in a created situation that varies enormously from the everyday reality that listeners encounter outside the classroom.

Stepanovienė (2012) notes that students require careful and attentive listening to the lectures in a classroom to understand and retain the information and contents of the lectures for their academic needs. Therefore, listening comprehension is mostly an ESP listening process and related to academic subjects and topics. Lynch (1997) argues that learners do not get opportunities in a language classroom to develop a sense of how to deal with real-world interlocutors in various interactional activities. In the world outside the classroom, listening is usually interactive and under the pressure of real-time, and so is difficult. Mideros (2015) notes that societal contexts of listening require different types of the dimension of listening. It also needs listeners' self-monitoring and self-assessment for their understanding of L2 listening based on verification and reconstruction of listening texts.

To teach listening in both contexts, strategies are important. Moreover, highly skilled learners use meta-cognitive strategies and hardly use translation strategies, whereas less-skilled

learners use more cognitive strategies and frequently use translation strategies during listening comprehension (Richards, 2015). Cunningham (2009) and Tergujeff (2013) discuss how the concept of international intelligibility of the English language promotes listening skill for effective communication by making it necessary to perceive a variety of standard accents of the language in real-life situations. On the other hand, Picard and Velautham (2016) claim that academic listening, its materials, and practice in an academic setting are formal and focused on the formal lecture and development of note-taking skills. However, Amanullah (2007) asserts that the teaching of listening skills is not only neglected but also completely out of focus in ELT at every academic level in Bangladesh. Most teachers do not know how to teach different strategies and techniques of listening comprehension. However, the issues related to the strategies and techniques of listening comprehension have rarely been studied directly in the context of Bangladesh.

Key themes in the literature that are relevant to this study

This chapter has reviewed the literature that creates a context for the current study. It has cited literature that highlights the status of listening skill in English language education in Bangladesh and the value it carries for the improvement of English language proficiency for the students of secondary students. The literature cited has indicated that even though English has been taught and learned even after the independence of Bangladesh for around 50 years, secondary students' performance in the use of English as well as in public examinations is not satisfactory.

The chapter also has provided an overview of the research that has been done so far in L2 listening both in the Bangladeshi and the other non-native English language education contexts. The reviewed literature has identified several listening comprehension challenges that influence the practice of listening in a classroom. The literature related to these comprehension challenges has reported that a lack of knowledge of phonological, syntactic, and semantic aspects creates barriers to successful listening comprehension. Moreover, the L2 students have a problem applying *bottom-up* and *top-down* listening strategies accordingly to relate cognitive and meta-cognitive aspects of memory. The literature also has reported the difference and requirements between the classroom and societal listening comprehension. Many of the studies have argued that the challenges of teaching listening to the students exist as the teachers often think that the practice of listening through testing of the listening exercises is the teaching of listening. The studies I have reviewed highlight the need to find

contextually adaptable ways of dealing with the issues of the teaching of listening comprehension skills, related to enabling both the teachers and the secondary students to improve their English language proficiency. The reviewed literature also highlights that specific training programs on ELT are needed for the teachers to train them on how to teach oral skills in the classroom and how to assess these skills.

Chapter Four: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate the spectrum of policy and practice regarding listening skill in English education in the Bangladeshi context. It focused more specifically on the challenges of implementing listening skill in teaching and testing for English language education at the secondary level. The study also has explored how listening is a complex issue in Bangladesh, as secondary students do not face the listening skill test before they attempt the IELTS examination. So, to understand the listening difficulties of the Bangladeshi secondary students and the teaching of listening by the IELTS trainers, this study has also investigated perceptions of the IELTS listening test and the preparatory course provided by IDP at local preparatory centres. The overarching question that guides this research is:

How is the policy of listening in English language education implemented in secondary schools in Bangladesh?

This gives rise to a number of sub-questions:

1. What is the current policy and practice of listening skill in the context of secondary English education in Bangladesh?

2. How does any difference between curriculum policy and practice for listening pedagogy affect English language education in Bangladesh?

3. How can the challenges of teaching and assessing listening skill in secondary English language education in Bangladesh be dealt with?

4. How do secondary students perceive the challenges of listening comprehension of the IELTS exam?

5. How can potential IELTS test-takers in Bangladesh develop their listening comprehension skills by applying the strategies of listening?

To answer the research questions, I collected four types of data. These are:

1. Data through semi-structured interviews
2. Data through survey questionnaires
3. Data through documents and government gazettes
4. Data through artefacts

Overall research approach

Different types of research approaches prevail in the realm of research projects that are distinctive from one another in terms of inquiry, philosophy, and theoretical underpinnings. Therefore, in every research study, the research approach and design are grounded in the ways a researcher thinks about and understands the world − in other words, how their ontological and epistemological positions shape the methodological choices they make (Chowdhury, 2019; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As far as educational research is concerned, it can be defined as a critical inquiry focusing on educational judgments and decisions to improve practice (Foreman-Peck & Winch, 2010). This study has used both qualitative and quantitative research tools. Hence, it is essential to understand the underlying philosophy of using both qualitative and quantitative tools in a single research project as different types of research questions demand different types of research methods be applied to answer those questions (Cohen et al., 2018; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). For this reason, this study uses both numeric and narrative data and qualitative and quantitative methods to meet the need for the research. Therefore, this type of research methodology is premised on pragmatism for its ontological and epistemological positions. Cohen et al. (2018) suggest that *pragmatism* is indeed practical, and it generates debate that there may be solitary or multiple forms of reality that can be subjective or objective, scientific, or humanistic. This research approach is a practice-oriented approach to deal with practical problems in the practical world. Pragmatism is methodologically eclectic: it indicates that what functions well "to answer the research questions is the most useful approach to the investigation, be it a combination of experiments, case studies, surveys or whatever" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 23) because such an approach enhances the quality of the research. Moreover, pragmatism may lead to a qualitative research perspective. Pragmatism can accommodate quantitative elements in the overall qualitative design of research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As the study focuses on the current status of listening skill in the policy and practice of English language education in Bangladesh, the methodology is mainly based on a qualitative framework underpinned by quantitative survey data, using a *pragmatic research approach*. A

pragmatic research paradigm assumes that reality is constantly negotiable, debated, or interpreted, and here the epistemological stance is that knowledge should be examined using whatever tools are best suited to solve the research problem (Pretorius, 2018, June 21). This methodological approach helps a researcher handle different types of data according to the need for the analysis. This research paradigm can address both *what* (mostly quantitative) and *how* or *why* (qualitative) types of research questions (Cohen et al., 2018). Punch (2009) uses a nice analogy to substantiate the necessity of a pragmatic research approach by saying that the *substantive dog* wags the *methodological tail*, not vice versa. As both narrative and numeric data are needed to answer research questions, a need-based research approach is required rather than the allegiances or preferences of the researcher (Cohen et al., 2018). This type of approach accentuates the need-based nature of the study in connection to the involvement of the individuals or a group of people in social interactions to solve the relevant problems by research (Riazi, 2016). Most of the time, a pragmatic approach borrows from each approach, which best corresponds to its context, even if it means mixing them. Thus, even if a hierarchical top-down approach is possible to start the functional analysis, it is very common to switch to a bottom-up approach when changes to requirements are necessary (Voirin, 2018).

Theoretical approach

A theoretical approach is needed to explain a phenomenon, draw connections, and make an analysis of a research study. It enables the researcher to choose a method of research. Fulton and Krainovich-Miller (2010) compare the role of the theoretical framework to a map or travel plan; so, the researcher should select an appropriate theoretical approach by considering the need for the study problem. So, the theoretical approach to this study guided me like a travel plan by which I have defined, discussed, and evaluated the theory relevant to my research problem. Grant and Osanloo (2014) suggest that the research questions of a study, as well as the aim of the study, should entail noticeable aspects of the theoretical framework, and the aspects must be explicitly stated in the early stage of thesis writing. In the later sections, I have explained the key concepts and methods that have guided my study and showed that the study is grounded in the data I collected. In the following sections, I have explained why I have chosen an emergent design as a particular approach to shape my research design.

Emergent design

In a broader aspect of the methodological approach, the research design was an emergent one. As the theoretical approach to this study is based on *grounded theory*, the emergent design is chosen for this study because it creates scope in grounded theory (Creswell, 2007) to distinguish between 'sensitizing concepts' and 'pre-configured codes'. In this type of research design, researchers can take cues from the data, process, or conclusions. So, the whole study becomes a reflection of varying levels of emergent characteristics within that research process (Creswell, 2007).

The theory I followed to investigate was *grounded theory*, which is not based on particularly any existing theory. The *grounded theory* design was more apt for this study as the contextual phenomenon was "grounded" in data, which could provide a better explanation than a theory borrowed "off the shelf" (Creswell, 2012). It does not limit the role of the research in the process-making but gives choices to make categories of interpretation, connects questions to the data, and interweaves personal values and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It solves problems in a sensible way that suits the conditions that exist now, rather than obeying fixed theories, ideas, or rules. The *grounded theory* can be evaluated against various yardsticks. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested four main criteria for the *grounded theory* that emerged from the data:

- the closeness of the *fit* between the theory and the data;
- how readily understandable the theory is by the laypersons working in the field, i.e., that it makes sense to them;
- the ability of the theory to be general to a 'multitude of diverse daily situations within the substantive area, not just to a specific type of situation';
- the theory must enable partial control to be exercised over the process and the structures of day-to-day situations that evolve in time, such that the researcher who is using the theory can have sufficient control of such situations to render it worthwhile to apply the theory to these (p. 245).

Therefore, this type of design created space not to make the data fit in theory but the theory fit in the data. Therefore, flexibility in the field, while collecting data, allowed me to shape the progress of the investigation to elicit rich data. In the qualitative data analysis, the creation of coding at the initial stage remains relatively descriptive and open in emergent

design but gradually becomes the element in the process of theory creation (Morgan, 2008). Emergent design created a flexible scope to remain open to get more data from the interviewees. Schmidt (2014) posited that the emergent design of research creates space and scope to change strategies and procedures in the field to act prophylactically in any situation of the study. The emergent research design also stresses the importance of "letting a theory emerge from the data rather than using specific, pre-set categories such as we saw in the axial coding paradigm (e.g., casual conditions, content, intervening condition, strategies, and consequences)" (Creswell, 2012, p. 429). In this regard, the emergent research design also allowed me to collate the themes that emerged from my discussion with my participants and led me to re-consider the themes through different theoretical lenses based on a pragmatic approach. In this regard, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) also highlight the need for freedom of the researcher in the field to discover analytical procedures that might not be decided in advance. The concept of research freedom helped me put conscious effort and focus on letting the themes emerge naturally from the data. It also allowed me to build and reshape concepts that emerged during the interpretation of data.

I entered the field to investigate the understandings of the policy-makers of curriculum, secondary teachers from both rural and urban areas about listening skill for English language education, and the complexities within the context that influenced teaching, learning, and testing of listening skill for the secondary students. Simultaneously, I also investigated the IELTS test preparation experience of the IELTS trainers, preparatory IELTS students, and the experienced IELTS test-takers as a better example to have an understanding of the listening test as well as potential listening comprehension difficulties. This is because the secondary students do not face a listening test unless they prepare themselves for the IELTS test, as the listening skill is not still part of the assessment process in the public examinations.

During my field visit, I consciously gave priority to the participants during the interviews and the context for an in-depth understanding of the existing tensions. Being flexible, I have had the chance to select the teachers from both urban and rural schools who were taking the initiative to teach listening tasks in their relative schools and facing different types of challenges in doing so. According to Morgan (2008, p. 247), " if the research questions and goals change in response to new information and insights, then the research design may need to change accordingly." Therefore, this flexibility of the emergent research design helped me collect and analyse data by allowing me ongoing changes in the research design according to what I learned and what goals of the study I needed to pursue next.

My position as a researcher

When I got access to the field of my research, I tried to put aside the theories and hypotheses I read. I also willingly tried to suspend the reading of the current policy and curriculum of the English textbook for the secondary level. I mentally prepared myself to focus on the phenomenon and on the naturally occurring data to collect for the analysis in the latter part of my study. Therefore, I only listened and recorded the statements, explanations, and experiences without interrupting them. For this reason, although I conducted semi-structured interviews, some of my interview sessions were lengthy ranging from 20 minutes to 50 minutes per participant. I remained flexible so that the interview participants could generate a more naturally occurring flow of conversation.

In terms of my position as an Assistant Professor of English who has been working for the government, I had to adjust my identity several times, as some of the participants were my junior teachers, some were my colleagues, and some of them were my direct seniors who I had worked with. It is common in the social context of Bangladesh that a position in the civil service is maintained in terms of seniority by age and service length. So, it was not useful for me, being a researcher in a field, to cling to my government identity. Moreover, as I was also a teacher, it was inevitable that my perspective and values influenced the interactions with the participants thus making it tough for me to conduct objective and value-free research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited that the values of the researcher were always intrinsic and interactively connected in all stages of the research process and the findings of the research emerged through the interactions between the researcher and the researched. As both a teacher and researcher, I had to very carefully position myself when I interacted with the participants of my research. So, I consciously positioned myself simply as a researcher so that my government identity could not come to the fore during the interview sessions. I intended to create an easy and spontaneous conversation between the participants and me. However, implementing my intention was not an easy task.

Before entering the field, I discussed my approach with my supervisors and received suggestions to present myself not as a government employee and an English teacher but a researcher who intends to explore the complexities related to the policy, practice, and testing of listening skill in the English language at the secondary level. Initially, I was guided by my habitual way of behaviour and way of talking with the interviewees. This situation quickly made me realise that my conventional behaviour might be an obstacle to becoming more flexible with them, and I felt there was an invisible wall of formality as my approach

signalled them a sense of a formal interview. So, after a while, I pushed myself internally to act like a researcher who left his previous position and identity to become informal and more flexible. I shared the story of my research journey that I took over the last few years in Australia and New Zealand and expressed how the research on this issue could provide a better understanding.

I explained to the interviewees why I came from New Zealand and where I was pursuing my Ph.D. I explained to them that I was working under the Ministry of Education as an English teacher who used to teach at government colleges in Bangladesh and why I chose the area of research. Before asking questions to the teachers, it made me confident to create an informal rapport with them as a researcher. This situation helped me get more natural conversations with them. The interviews of the participants were conducted until I had obtained data from a set number of people. So, once I reached that number, I stopped collecting interview data. I planned my range of interviews to reach a stage of saturation as the numbers and groups of interview participants that I interviewed might not provide any more insightful data to get a different dimension or category for the research questions. The stage of saturation is a situation when "no new insights, properties, dimensions, relationships, codes or categories are produced even when new data are added, when all of the data are accounted for in the core categories and subcategories" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61). Research may make a subjective decision that new data are supposed not to provide further insights into the process of category development (Creswell, 2012). In the data collection procedure, to reach the level of saturation point, it is advised that the coding for developing categories from data analysis has been done to fill in and sufficiently support a situation when a theory may emerge.

Overview of data collection tools in connection to the research questions

Firstly, I have developed an overarching question followed by multiple sub-questions. Developing an overarching question can set the stage for developing related sub-questions (Agee, 2009). So, to address the first, second and third sub-questions generated from the clearly stated overarching research question, I have had interviews with the Head of Curriculum of NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board), the institution to formulate curriculum policy and design textbooks, two curriculum experts of NCTB, and two subject experts of the Secondary English textbooks. I also interviewed teachers from urban and rural schools. The purpose was to ask them to explain the ground reality of teaching listening skill in classroom practice and assessment procedures, both in rural and urban contexts. The

participants are described in detail further in this chapter. The data from the interviews with IELTS trainers and experienced test-takers, complemented by the survey data and artefacts, addressed the fourth and fifth sub-questions to answer. The surveys were conducted twice and the participants were IELTS preparatory course students and they were 224 in total. The pre-course survey was conducted at the beginning of the IELTS preparatory course and the post-course survey was conducted at the end of the preparatory course. The intention of the pre and post-course surveys was not to validate or to check the effectiveness of the preparatory course but to identify and explore the areas of difficulties (micro and macro skills) that potential IELTS test takers face regarding their listening comprehension. Over the next five sections, I intend to explain the types of data and why I have collected these types of data, how I have analysed the data, and what type of data answers which specific research question.

Ethical considerations

As far as the ethical issue of research is concerned, it is necessary to gather institutional or official approval from the relevant institutional review board before conducting a research study. The ethical issues should be related to three principles: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After starting my PhD journey, first of all, I had to do a supervisor agreement on the initial research concept. Later on, before my confirmation as a PhD researcher in my first year of study, I had to submit a formal application to the Educational Human Ethics committee (ERHEC) of the University of Canterbury describing the detail of my research plan and the data collection procedure and the access to the imminent data collection sites. Although there was no apparent risk in participating in this study, the relevant issues were taken into account while conducting the research. After receiving suggestions for corrections and clarification from the ERHEC, my research project was granted formal approval (Appendix B).

Finally, the data collection procedure took off when I made contact with gatekeepers to negotiate several accesses to the policy-makers, teachers, trainers, and students. Upon gaining their verbal consent, I provided consent forms to the participants to be signed. I then obtained those signed consent forms before the commencement of the interview sessions. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with the individual stakeholders on the agreed date and time. Cohen et al. (2018) suggested that participants might need assurance from the researcher time and again that their data would not be given to anyone. I also delivered all

sorts of written and verbal explanations in *Bangla* to ensure that every participant was clear about the purpose of the study and their activities and role. I assured the participants that I would use pseudonyms to keep their anonymity and that the raw data would be confidential. I also clarified to all the participants that their participation in the study was voluntary. Moreover, they had also the complete right to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were also given the assurance that the data collected from them would only be used for the thesis and related publications and not for any official use. Some of the data I may keep for future academic publications and the rest of the data will be destroyed after five years of the completion of my study.

The ethical obligations of the study also included proper respect for the opinions of the participants and their cultural and social values. I was always aware of this ethical obligation while addressing participants from different levels of society with different positions in society. As a researcher as well as a teacher, it was my ethical responsibility to acknowledge the value and importance of their perceptions and opinions and to respect their voices. The more time I spent in the field with the participants, the more I came to realise that because of their spontaneity in discussion with me and the worthy time and effort they shared, the participants also implicitly own the study. So, I have connected the participants by a connective link via google (goo.gl/3vQ5wD) so that they can follow the progress of the study and know the findings.

Gaining access to data sites

The issue of gaining access to the field for collecting data to research a study is crucial. To conduct a research study in an institution is complicated as different layers are involved in the regulation of access. Moreover, gaining access to an individual as a research participant is another challenge that a researcher faces in his or her access to the field (Flick, 2009).
In doing my research, I was able to gain access to the administrative institutions for education, such as the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DOSHE), and the schools both in rural and urban areas. Firstly, as I have been working under the Ministry of Education and the institutions and schools also function under the same ministry, it was easy for me to make a relationship with the policy-makers and school teachers to be my participants. Secondly, I looked for an appropriate person in Bangladesh who could assist me as a *gatekeeper* in accessing the institutions. Creswell (2012) described that a gatekeeper might be an individual (for example,

an administrator, a teacher, a principal, or a group leader of a program) who could play a role either officially or unofficially at the research site where the researcher planned to study. In this regard, I met up with a former colleague in the city where I used to live. After I recounted my need to gain access to the institutions, he invited me to his college to discuss my goals in detail. I then discussed the feasibility of doing my field study at institutes where his former colleagues were working. After the discussion in detail, my former colleague emerged as *gatekeeper* and arranged my visits and other informal procedures to have access to those institutes which I was required to visit for my study. Given (2008) suggested that gatekeepers, in qualitative research, work as an entry-point to assist the researcher concerned to gain access to the relevant community or organisation. In this regard, my gatekeeper also connected me with three key persons. One of them was working at NCTB, and the other two persons were headteachers in urban and rural schools, respectively. The person working with NCTB introduced me to the potential participants for the semi-structured interviews later. Similarly, two headteachers of schools introduced me to the English teachers who were willing to provide in-depth opinions and share experiences on my topic of research. I scheduled appointments with all the participants individually at different times for their convenience. I explained to the participants about the purpose and ethics of my research project. When I shared the issues of ethical obligations and explained the participants' consent forms and the use of pseudonyms in my thesis, the participants became more comfortable and confident. When I visited the administrative institution, my gatekeeper opened up for a short introductory speech to introduce me as a researcher to the Head of the Curriculum for NCTB and briefly described the purpose of my semi-structured interviews with him. The gatekeeper also played an important role in informing the Head of the NCTB that I might need to interview four to five policy-related persons who were working either as subject experts for textbooks for English education or as material developers for the national curriculum for English education. The gatekeeper also requested him to cooperate with me wholeheartedly. During the interview session, I made an excellent rapport with the Head of the Curriculum Committee, which helped me not only to gain rich interview data from him but also created a positive perception among the other probable interviewees who were related to the policymaking process. I also created a mutual comfort zone with them that inspired them to discuss my study. This friendly environment also helped them participate more actively in my research.

As I mentioned earlier, through the interview data, I was trying to understand the complexity of the teaching of listening skill in English language education for secondary students and the disconnections between the curriculum policy and classroom practice. I also realised the need to explore the challenges of testing listening skill in public examinations. The secondary students do not face a listening skill test. Many subsequently attempt the IELTS exam for a variety of reasons. Moreover, the IELTS test is the only available standard test format, and some of the participants suggested it should be a model for the listening test in a public examination. So, I had to plan to gather data related to the IELTS listening test. At that point, I made direct contact via email with one of my friends as a gatekeeper who was also a trainer for the IELTS preparatory course at an IELTS test centre approved by IDP, one of the trio who conducts and evaluates IELTS tests all around the world. I explained my project to him, and he then arranged a formal approval by the Head of the institute (Appendix C: A copy of the letter of permission) to have access to that centre for interview and survey participants. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) suggested that *gatekeepers* might play an important role in controlling access and re-access to a research site. I then made a formal schedule to meet the head of the department. When I met him, I started a formal conversation in the presence of the gatekeeper. He played the role to inform the head of the institute that I needed full cooperation from him and requested he would urge the fellow trainers and the preparatory IELTS students for the survey to support me fully during the data collection procedure. The gatekeeper provided the opportunity to build a rapport with the head of the institution and the IELTS preparatory course trainer. At the same time, being a researcher, I have also been able to understand the rights and restrictions of that centre during the data collection phase. Later on, the rapport with the head of the department created a space to approach directly to the IELTS preparatory course trainers.

I also gave the participants a firm assurance that all data, both in raw and refined form, would be held securely and kept for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of my thesis and only I might keep some part of the collected data even longer for my future academic publication. I also assured them that only my supervisors and I would have access to the data, and only I would access the recordings of the interviews.

Participants

For most human research studies, participants are the main sources of data. I would like to recognise them as the treasure trove of my study. Being a practising English teacher in Bangladesh, I found the participants provoked me to reconsider areas of English language education and, more specifically the issues related to listening comprehension by their practices, experiences, contextual notions, and lived realities. I interviewed several groups of participants ranging from secondary English language teachers, in both urban and rural schools, as well as the IELTS preparatory students, trainers, and experienced IELTS test-takers who were the participants related to the IELTS preparatory course (Appendices D & E). I had specific research questions to address, so I followed *purposive sampling* to select my participants from different stakeholders related to my study.

Description of the participants

The list of participants from different groups is given below with their descriptions. The following participants were related to the policy-making process. The details of their role and experience are given in the table below:

Table 1. *The list of participants and their roles in the qualitative phase of the study*

Pseudonym	Description of the participants	Instrument
The Head of the Curriculum, NCTB	He is the key person who formulates the curriculum, and syllabus, supervises the effectiveness of the textbooks and assessment procedures of those textbooks	Semi-structured Interview
Goutam	He is one of the two key persons who writes, edits and develops syllabus and materials for Secondary English textbooks	
Rahim	He is the other key person who writes, edits and develops syllabus and materials for Secondary English textbooks	
Hamid	He is one of the advisers of NCTB on secondary English textbooks	
Rashid	He is one of the advisers of NCTB on secondary English textbooks	

The following participants were secondary English teachers from an urban school. The details of their role and experience are given in the table below:

Table 2. *Secondary English teachers from an urban school*

Pseudonym	**Description of the participants**	**Instrument**
Shahed	An English teacher who has been teaching English for 15 years	Semi-structured Interview
Shamima	An English teacher who has been teaching English for 15 years	
Anam	An English teacher who has been teaching English for 15 years	
Shahnaz	An English teacher who has been teaching English for 12 years	
Nurul	An English teacher who has been teaching for 15 years	
Mahbub	An English teacher who has been teaching for 15 years	

The following participants were secondary English teachers from a rural school. The details of their role and experience are given in the table below:

Table 3. *Secondary English teachers from a rural school*

Pseudonym	**Description of the participants**	**Instrument**
Ismail	An English teacher who has been teaching English for 10 years	Semi-structured Interview
Kamal	An English teacher who has been teaching English for 20 years	
Mamun	An English teacher who has been teaching English for 5 years	
Solaiman	An English teacher who has been teaching English for 15 years	
Taher	An English teacher who has been teaching English for 20 years	

Yunus	An English teacher who has been teaching English for 7 years	

The following participants ranging from the IELTS preparatory students, trainers, and experienced IELTS test-takers, were the participants related to IELTS preparatory course (as shown in Table 4). I chose the IELTS trainers from a local IELTS centre affiliated with IDP. I also interviewed experienced IELTS test-takers who achieved a high score on the test. The trainers and the head of the centre that runs the preparatory course have been teaching the IELTS listening module for more than 12 years in Bangladesh. They have also been trained by IDP through different workshops conducted by the IELTS master trainers from Cambridge ESOL. The IELTS centre is the first centre in the city that runs this IELTS preparatory course and its mock tests for the last 18 years. The detail of their role and experience are given below:

Table 4. *Summary of the recruitment of the participants related to IELTS listening text*

Instrument	**Participants**	**Number of participants approached**	**Number of participants joined**	**A brief description of the participants**
Pre-course Survey Questionnaire	IELTS preparatory course students (Bangla-medium)	312	224	They were preparing to take IELTS for the first or second time at the IDP centre in Bangladesh. The type of participant group was post higher secondary students who were willing to go abroad for further studies.
Post-course Survey Questionnaire	IELTS preparatory course students (Bangla-medium)	312	224	
Semi-structured Interview	Experienced IELTS test-takers (Bangla-medium)	5	**Brief description of the role of the participants**	
		Drinmoi	A student who has taken the IELTS test twice scoring 7.0 in IELTS listening skill and now studying in an English-speaking country	
		Hafez	A student who has taken the IELTS test twice scoring 7.0 in IELTS listening skill and now studying in an English-speaking country	

		Shiraji	A student who has taken the IELTS test and scored 7.5 in IELTS listening skill. Now studying in an English-speaking country
		Faruq	A student who has taken the IELTS test twice scoring 8.0 in IELTS listening skill and now studying in an English-speaking country
		Ishmam	A student who has taken the IELTS test twice scoring 8.5 in IELTS listening skill and now preparing himself for studying in an English-speaking country
	IELTS preparatory-course trainers	6	**Brief description of the role of the participants**
		Khokon	An IELTS preparatory-course trainer with 12 years of experience
		Mashrur	The Head of the Centre as well as an IELTS preparatory-course trainer with 20 years of experience
		Ashek	An IELTS preparatory-course trainer with 15 years of experience
		Tiplu	An IELTS preparatory-course trainer with 15 years of experience
		Saif	An IELTS preparatory-course trainer with 13 years of experience
		Rumel	An IELTS preparatory-course trainer with 10 years of experience

Data collection tools

I used a range of methods to collect my data in the field. These are- semi-structured interviews, surveys, a review of the documents related to curriculum policy and several government gazettes, and artefacts. I aimed to encapsulate the overall picture of the policy, practice, assessment and implementation challenges of listening skill in the secondary level of English education. The multiple sources of data allowed me to explore the study from multiple viewpoints. I have had mainly two types of primary data, along with secondary data from the curriculum-policy documents. My research questions are required to know the aspects of *what*, *why* and *how* about the phenomenon. So, to know the aspects of *how*, I used *interviews* as the main source of data gathering and to supplement the data from the interviews, I conducted pre and post-surveys using questionnaires partially based on the

Likert scale. Some were multiple choice type questions with added 'text' boxes − to know the aspects of *why*. The surveys were done with IELTS potential test-takers who were taking a preparatory course to sit for the IELTS test. The pre-course survey was conducted at the beginning of the IELTS preparatory course and the post-course survey was conducted at the end of the preparatory course. Gillham (2005) suggested that both *interviews* and *survey questionnaires* serve separate needs. To know the answers to an issue from a large-scale population, a survey could be carried out using appropriate questionnaires. However, to achieve a depth of understanding of an issue, interviews were needed. I also analysed the government and non-government official documents from diverse sources to understand the backgrounds of philosophies and histories of policies and curricula.

Data collection procedure

I chose to collect data in a way that was appropriate to the research of situated action. As a research tool, both the interview and questionnaire serve distinctive purposes for the researcher. A questionnaire survey is apt for conducting a large-scale sample size to have a general understanding of the context as there is limited scope to explore 'what lies behind the answers to the questions' (Gillham, 2005, p. 23) of the survey. However, to achieve an in-depth understanding, a researcher needs to conduct an appropriate form of an interview (Gillham, 2005). Interview data, as a conduit of qualitative data analysis, consider the interactions as the study of that specific group of people as a microcosm of that society to dig out an issue (Weber, 1990). Gillham (2005) further argued that "the real-world researcher is constantly having to adapt or compromise on methods because of the constraints encountered" (p. 24). Analysing an interview is a more subjective evaluation to make us understand what is being studied (Gillham, 2005).

So, I mainly chose the interview as a tool for collecting data from different groups of stakeholders for my qualitative data to answer my five research questions. Later on, I also included survey data to supplement the interview data in answering the research questions mainly related to IELTS preparation and practice for listening skill. I also used secondary sources of data from different types of documents and artefacts to complement my primary sources of data in analysing the study.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviewing is a popular data collection tool in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012), which is also identified as a potential means of pure information transfer (Cohen et al., 2018). A research interview is not like an everyday conversation but an interaction having a specific purpose and having specific questions to be answered (Cohen et al., 2018). Interview data are natural feedback via human interaction for knowledge production (Cohen et al., 2018). The types of Interviews are divided into mainly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured patterns (Alvesson, 2011). Once I decided to collect interview data based on a semi-structured pattern, I had to consider the form of interviewing that could best help me understand the prime phenomenon that I focused on to answer the research questions of my study. So, I opted for one-on-one interviews. I had also to think about the schedule of every individual, the place of interviewing and the amount of time available for me as well as for them. Creswell (2012) and Frances, Michael, and Patricia (2009) noted that although this type of interview is a time-consuming and costly approach, at the same time, it also generates rich data from the participants as they share detailed information about their personal feelings, perceptions, and opinions of a given phenomenon. One-on-one interviews are effective for participants who are hesitant to speak in a group or publicly. In this type of interview, a participant feels at ease resulting in a better chance to share more ideas and words with the researcher (Creswell, 2012). Following this type of interview, interview participants assisted me in developing a friendly but trustful researcher-participant relationship. Another advantage of getting data through this type of interview is that data can be cross-referenced with other data, such as observed behaviour or documents (Gillham, 2005).

Designing the questions for semi-structured interviews

Given (2008) suggested that the researcher should prepare the research questions in a form that could be posed directly as questions to the interviewee. Good semi-structured interview questions should be brief, simple, and open, and often the researcher will create space for the interviewees to come up with reflective experiences. To have such experiences from the respondents, the researcher should pose “what” and “how” questions rather than “why” questions (Given, 2008). I approached each interview with a roughly semi-structured outline of the areas I wanted to cover, but I also used open-ended questions (Mathers, Fox, & Hunn, 1998) and allowed participants to talk more about what they thought was important.

How the interview data was collected

Silverman (2016) suggests that as the interview is a social encounter, the researcher should go to the selected place or site chosen by the respondents and interviewer mutually where the interviews would take place. I showed them my semi-structured questionnaires and the consent forms to read and sign. I made appointments with them before the interviews so that they could feel at ease and take their time. All the collected data were recorded. The recorded data were transcribed and the data were reduced to a format for coding. In collecting the interview data, I visited various institutes in rural and urban areas both in Dhaka and Chittagong as the interview participants were from different institutes. As I followed purposive sampling through the gatekeepers, I approached the policymakers, teachers from both urban and rural areas, trainers, and experienced test-takers of the IELTS examination.

I initiated my interviews with the urban English teachers from a secondary school in Chittagong. I interviewed six teachers from an urban school in my city and six teachers from a rural school that is 130 km away from the city where I live. I approached those who were teaching English and listening modules of the secondary textbooks at different Grades. Having set an individual time with the teachers, I sat for 20 to 50 minutes with the teachers to interview them. We fixed the timing which would not interfere with their teaching time. Most of the interviews with the teachers took place in the school, where there was a separate room for conducting English classes using multimedia and computers. Some interview sessions took place outside the school in places where teachers usually spent their free time. The interviewees were provided with the information necessary for the study and their written consent was obtained before the interview. Based on participants' preferences, interviews were conducted in English or *Bangla* and were recorded using a Panasonic voice recorder.

After finishing the interviews with the teachers of that school, I travelled to a rural school, which was situated 130 kilometres away from Chittagong city. The headteacher of the school welcomed me. He offered me tea and biscuits. I got myself refreshed in the annex room of his office and chatted with him until the class hours ended. As the headteacher informed all the English language teachers of the school, the teachers appeared in the room of the headteacher. They all greeted me and seemed curious about the interview. It gave me a sense of realisation that they were eagerly waiting for someone who would listen to their issues and challenges related to the teaching of English and practices of listening skill in the classroom. Therefore, after the formal meeting with each of them, the headteacher arranged a corner in his adjacent room to talk to every teacher one by one. I tried to conduct the interviews in a

very informal way. I tried to use the *Bangla* language which made them feel comfortable. I assumed that each of the interviews would last for 20 to 25 minutes and the first interview with Mamun continued for 20 minutes. However, the second interview with Taher lasted up to almost an hour. Therefore, the other teachers were in a rush to go home, said sorry to me, and requested me to come tomorrow. As my gatekeeper arranged my accommodation to stay for a couple of days in a house near the school, I was happy to meet the rest of the teachers the following day for the interviews.

The next day, I went to school in the morning. I waited for Ismail to finish his class hour. When he finished his class, we went to the place where I conducted the interviews the previous day. So, I managed to interview Ismail, Yunus, and Kamal by the time the school closed on that day. However, although Solaiman was supposed to be present for the interview on that day, I came to know later that he gave a sick call for the day. So, before the school closed in the afternoon, I took his contact number from the headteacher and called him to know about his health. I assured him that if required, I could come later when he would be recovered from his sickness. However, after having my phone call, he assured me that if he felt better by the following day, he would call me for the interview.

Meanwhile, I worked on transferring the data from the recorder to my laptop and arranged those sound files under different pseudonyms. I went to the school the following day again, and as I had time, I also had a few informal chats with other English teachers who did not come for the interviews. The informal chats with them provided me with insights into what they were thinking during the whole process of the interviews. It also gave me notions about why they did not voluntarily come to take part in the interviews. It also provoked new understandings of the realities that participants faced in the context, and guided me to the areas that I needed to explore in more detail.

In the meantime, I received a phone call, and Solaiman requested me to pay a visit to his house which was not far from the school. After going there in the evening, I was offered a tea with "*chanachur*[9]." As our discussion developed while drinking tea and "*chanachur*", Solaiman was frank and eager to discuss familial and everyday issues of his life and career. It created a friendly space, and I had the chance to continue the discussion for a long time. It

[9] A local snack mix which consists of a variable mixture of dried and spicy ingredients, such as fried lentils, peanuts, chickpea flour, ghatia, corn, vegetable oil, chickpeas, flaked rice, fried onion and curry leaves.

helped me get more naturally occurring data that might not be possible to get in another interview setting.

After ending up with the participants there, I set out for my next journey to Dhaka, where I was supposed to meet the Head of the Curriculum Committee and other participants related to the policy-making process according to the scheduled meeting. The bulk of data in this thesis came from in-depth interviews with policymakers. They expressed their views on English education, the necessity of English education, the medium of instruction policy in secondary school, and methods of English teaching in Bangladesh. I tried to conduct the interviews in a very informal way. I tried to use *Bangla* language through which interviewees felt comfortable. However, some of the interviewees spoke in English.

Later on, after a few days, I came back from Dhaka to my city. I was then left with the interview participants of IELTS trainers and experienced IELTS test-takers. As I mentioned earlier, the *gatekeeper* was my friend and an IELTS trainer at the centre. He scheduled several meetings with both the head of the centre, named Masrur as well as the other five trainers. The trainers were cordial and cooperative to discuss the issues I wanted to explore. I conducted the interviews in a separate room, which was the meeting room in the centre. I had to go several times to the centre as I could only conduct one or two interview sessions each day depending on the free time and convenient schedule of the trainers. The trainers had different schedules to conduct listening preparatory sessions with different batches at different times. They shared opinions about the learners' listening problems and the reasons behind those problems. Based on their responses, I asked follow-up questions to delve deep into the tensions of the phenomenon. This technique prompted the participants to clarify or support their statements with added examples. Each interview was conducted in *Bangla* and audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. All the interviews lasted for approximately 25 to 30 minutes except for the interview with Masrur, which continued for around 50 minutes. He was so spontaneous to share opinions as he talked about the overall root causes of the listening problems of the Bangla-medium students. After finishing with the trainers, I interviewed a bunch of six experienced test-takers who did their preparatory course from that centre and scored a band-score 7.0 or above on the IELTS listening test. They provided me with insights about their preparation and the way they were prepared for the test by the trainers. They expressed their listening problems and how they dealt with these problems to attempt the different sections of listening in the IELTS exam to score high in the test and how the experienced test-takers employed their listening strategies differently than

the novice test-takers who are taking a preparatory course for IELTS. The in-depth interviews helped identify the challenges that students faced for both micro and macro skills of listening (such as recognising reduced forms such as 'of' in a *cup of tea* or processing fast speech) and macro-skills (such as recognising the communicative functions of utterances or developing strategies such as identifying keywords) involved in completing the test to the results for each listening task. The third, fourth, and fifth research sub-questions were addressed by semi-structured interviews with the participants.

Survey

The survey is a further method of gathering information from individuals. The survey is one of the frequently used research tools for collecting data, often numeric data, in a quantitative process of research analysis. In my surveys, I employed a questionnaire with several questions to be asked about the demographic descriptions of the participants, problems related to IELTS listening tasks, issues related to listening difficulties, and the strategies the participants applied. I designed a questionnaire to administer a face-to-face survey. I planned the layout and structure of the survey questionnaires to allow data entry to computer input on the Excel sheet saving the file as CSV format so that appropriate data analysis could be produced. The survey questionnaire that I constructed also had qualitative elements. Apart from multiple-choice questions based on a Likert rating scale, the questionnaire included text boxes asking reasons as well as the rating of the choices. This form of data collection tool helped me collect large amounts of data from several groups, IELTS preparatory students at the centre from time to time.

Designing the survey questionnaires

A questionnaire is a form used in a survey design that was filled in and completed by the participants in a study to return to the researcher (Creswell, 2012). In other words, a questionnaire is a research instrument that consists of a set of questions or other types of prompts that aims to collect information from a respondent (Given, 2008). In designing the survey questionnaires, I drew on my knowledge of the Bangladesh context together with the listening issues highlighted in previous Bangladesh research and principles of language learning identified in international literature. Moreover, being a practising English teacher in Bangladesh, I can affirm that there are problems in the teaching of listening in Bangladesh. I conducted a survey twice, one before the Listening Preparatory Course and the other on the completion of the Preparatory Course. The questionnaire that was used for the pre-

preparatory course survey consisted of 22 items including the questions related to demographic descriptions of the participants, their habits of listening to the English language, types of listening tasks that were difficult for them, the reasons for listening difficulty for those tasks, and the listening strategies they applied in their comprehension of listening (Appendix F). The questionnaire that was used for the post-preparatory course survey consisted of 13 items, and the items were similar to the pre-course survey questionnaire except omitting the questions related to demographic descriptions of the participants. The contents of the questions were based on a Likert scale (a rating scale of five options), multiple choices, and in some cases, the questions were followed by text boxes (Appendix G). The content and the format of the questionnaire were developed and based on *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* (Cullen, French, & Jakeman, 2014), Buck's (2001) list of listening difficulties, a comprehensive review of L2 listening literature (such as Goh, 2012; Graham, 2006) to ensure its construct validity. For example, following the list of listening difficulties identified by the abovementioned researchers, I clustered the questions into four major types (such as accent, speed, vocabulary, and background knowledge about content in the listening text). Then I clustered questions related to task-type difficulties (such as monologue, dialogue, and group conversation).

How the surveys were conducted

I visited an IDP registered IELTS test centre in my city to gather survey participants. The centre also conducts an IELTS preparatory course for the potential IELTS test-takers. All the survey participants were IELTS preparatory students who were supposed to take the IELTS exam after completing their preparatory course. The preparatory course duration was 4-5 months. I approached participants until the number of participants reached more than 300 as Creswell (2012) advised that a sufficient number of participants (approximately 350 for a survey study but the size may vary depending on several factors) would be required for the statistical analysis and generality of the finding result. I used convenience sampling to gather participants, such as on a first-come, first-choice basis. As the institute used to conduct a cohort of 50 students in a batch, I had to approach seven to eight batches in total at different times of their schedules to collect a sufficient number of survey participants as not all the participants of each batch showed interest in taking part in the survey.

Moreover, some participants were not interested as they were supposed to participate again in the post-course survey. Some students dropped out of the course and so from the survey. One

of the reasons might be that they found gaps in their skills after doing the preparatory course and being frustrated and fearful of the IELTS real test, they changed their mind about going abroad and intended to take admission to local universities. Some of them, after participating in the pre-course survey, thought the survey irrelevant to them and so they were not interested in participating in the post-course survey. I also excluded some participants from the post-course survey for their incomplete return of the questionnaire as they did not mention their listening problems related to listening. It might be for the reason that some of the participants were not confident about their improvement in listening skill doing the preparatory course. So, they opted out of the post-course survey. So, finally, a total number of 224 students participated in both the pre-course and post-course surveys.

During the pre-course survey, the questionnaire was given to the participants immediately after their first preparatory listening lesson. All the participants handed in their completed questionnaires after approximately 25 minutes. The intention of the pre-and post-course surveys was not to validate or to check the effectiveness of the preparatory course but to identify and explore the areas of difficulties (micro and macro skills) that potential IELTS test takers face regarding their listening skill. Demographic factors (socioeconomic characteristics of a population) are also taken into consideration in the questionnaires to identify if these factors influence the test-takers listening abilities and difficulties, as Brown and Lee (2015) posited that cultural backgrounds could be both facilitating and interfering in the process of listening. Later on, the data obtained from pre-course and post-course survey questionnaires of the preparatory course were arrayed on a spreadsheet and analysed by a corpus-based KWIC analysis using both Antconc and R Studio software.

Use of documents

Along with the interview and survey data to analyse this research study, I examined several documents including the gazettes and government papers on education policies of Bangladesh such as Bangladesh Education Statistics 2019, National Education Policy 2010, the secondary curriculum for English 2012, and syllabi of different classes for English language education, previous question papers of national examinations held by different Boards of Secondary and Higher Secondary education where English was assessed as a subject, training manuals for the training of the teachers, English textbooks for different classes, and the reports of English language development projects in Bangladesh run by different donor agencies. I also drew on newspaper reports and editorial columns during my

stay in the field and through the internet access available to me when I was back from the field. I found that newspaper reports and editorial columns usually were publishing the current insights and arguments. Therefore, they provided me with contextual information and helped me compare what the participants expressed to me to the accounts of relevant problems related to policy and practice of oral skills for English language education.

Artefacts

Artefacts could be useful in educational research as they could convey messages (Higgins & McAllaster, 2004). The artefacts might range from desks, chairs, tables, exercise books, textbooks, ornaments, display materials, clothing, pictures, maps lesson plans, notice boards, smartboards, learning materials, etc. (Cohen et al., 2018). As far as my data collection procedure was concerned, I also collected and examined a range of artefacts as an additional source of data to add a new dimension and observation to my data analysis. I collected and examined a range of artefacts during my data collection phase that included teachers' lesson plans, various listening sheets and IELTS materials provided by the trainers at the IELTS preparatory test centre, teaching aids and materials such as digital teaching equipment, multimedia projectors, and PowerPoint presentations used by the teachers and trainers.

Method of Analysis

There are different types of techniques and methods to interpret and analyse both qualitative and quantitative data. The research method that I used for the interview data is a corpus-based analysis based on KWIC (keyword in context) technique. This method is one of the many analysis techniques in the typology of qualitative and quantitative data analysis in educational research (i.e. Figure 3). In linguistics, a *corpus* means a 'body' of a specific language, and more specifically a large collection of naturally occurring expressions of that specific language. A corpus can be huge or tiny and can be created as part of the research. Baker (2010) averred that corpus-based analysis could be made within a smaller data set to examine the frequency and plausibility of the language contained as a source of examples. Therefore, I have created my corpora from all the interviews I conducted as well as the text-boxes answered by the survey participants to find themes in the data, as the identification of themes (Ryan & Russel, 2003) is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research.

There is no doubt that, nowadays, corpora processing software is very useful to locate relevant textual themes from a huge volume of texts by providing statistical frequencies and concordances of that specific corpora to scale and analyse relevant phenomena that a

researcher wants to explore. However, to contextualize the corpora, human analysis is needed with its subjectivity, goals, and preferences while processing data through the software (Artero & Serban, 2013). Moreover, "Advances in the studies of spoken corpora and conversation analysis have illuminated the complexity of oral discourse and language" (Hinkel, 2006, p. 117). Canagarajah (2006) also speculated that corpus-based research would be one of the new methodological paradigms for future trends in the research of language teaching and learning practices to enhance the learning process.

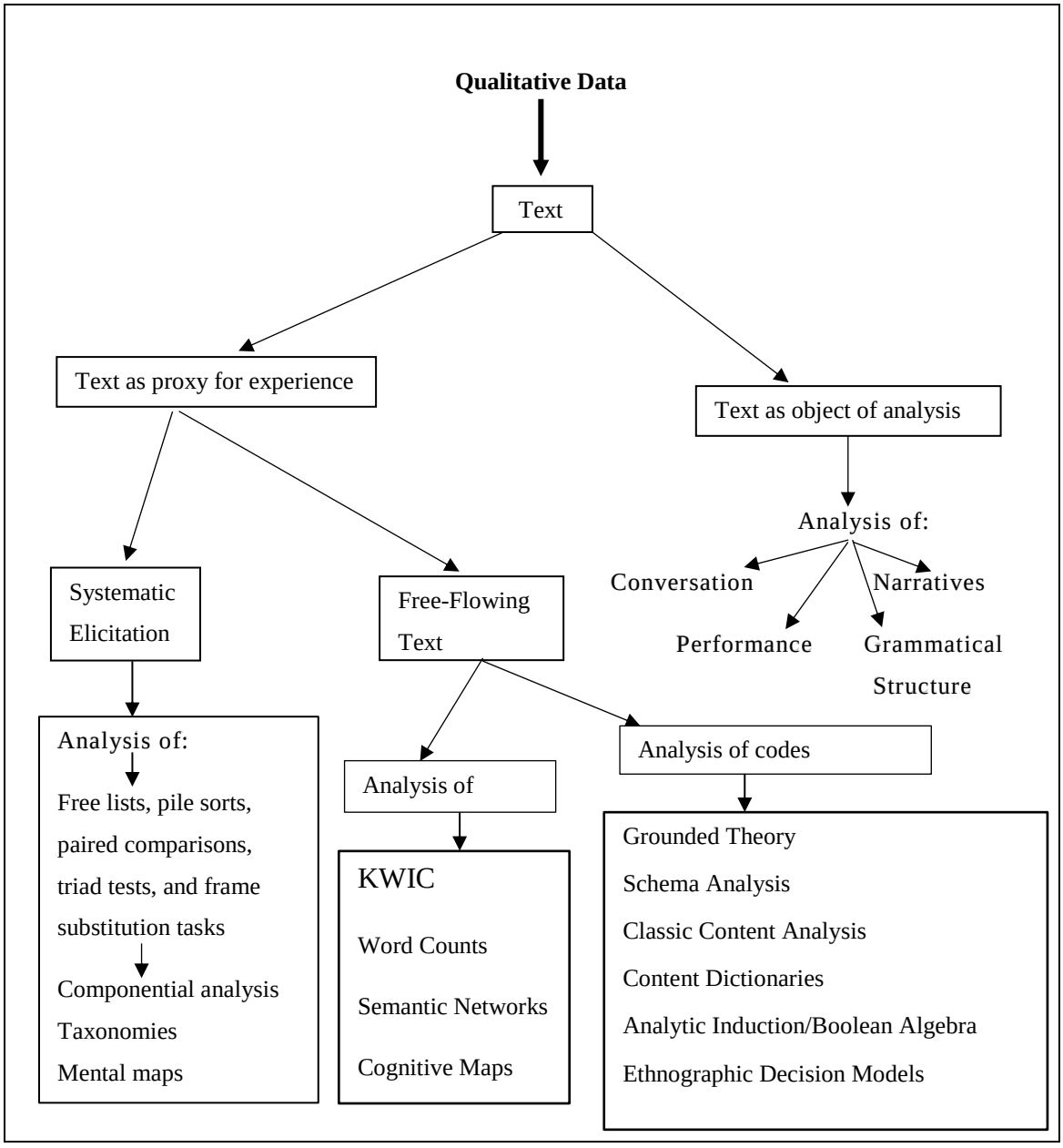

Figure 3. Typology of Qualitative Analysis Techniques (Adapted from Denzin & Lincoln, 2018)

Baker (2010) argued that among all other corpus-based analytical processes to find themes from a corpus, the KWIC technique is the most useful. This technique allows a researcher to uncover themes from a corpus in two ways. Firstly, it allows the researcher to uncover recurrent 'prosodies' and 'preferences' from the corpora, and secondly, it helps the researcher sort out incorrect assumptions about the contents of his or her corpus (Baker, 2010). If we want to understand what people think, we have to look at the words they use. Words are the windows to peep into people's minds (Ryan & Russel, 2003). D'Andrade (1995) explained it differently by saying that "indeed, anyone who has listened to long stretches of talk, whether generated by a friend, spouse, workmate, informants, or patient, knows how frequently people circle through the same network of ideas" (p. 287). Ryan and Russel (2003) averred several types of techniques for discovering themes from qualitative data and the keyword-in-context (KWIC) technique was one of them. In this research, this technique was applied as the initial step to look into data for the probable themes because (Ryan & Russel, 2003) the repetitions of words indicate the recurrent ideas of the spoken texts.

I used the corpus linguistics method because it had the purpose to use it as a method as a part of research to interpret the data. The benefit of using corpus linguistics is that it is not triangulating data but looking at the same data from several different perspectives. It is not something that many researchers have used for this kind of educational research. This method also gives flexibility according to the practical need to analyse what is required to answer the specific research questions.

The data obtained through semi-structured interviews were transcribed in *Bangla* using Roman letters. The transcribed data of the interviews were considered as a corpus of exploratory language data. Then the data were analysed based on the existing corpora. For this reason, initially, I have counted the frequency of words from the corpora to search for the probable themes as "word-based techniques are typically fast and efficient ways to start looking for themes" (Ryan & Russel, 2003, p. 88).

To analyse the corpus data, I have combed through my corpora of data that was transcribed in *Bangla* using Roman letters. I counted the frequencies of the words in context with an advanced text analysis application named AntConc. This software application counted those words that had been found at least 50 times in the KWIC of the transcribed interview texts. The count of the total keywords-in-context identified a list of 45 frequently uttered words (as shown in Table 5) that were found more than 50 times in the whole interview corpora. It

helped me find the initial themes to uncover the similarities and differences of the themes in the context that emerged from the data that often occurred in interviews. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggested that "word counts are useful for discovering patterns of ideas in any body of text, from field notes to responses to open-ended questions" (p. 776). The words in the list of *word frequency* helped me see the concordances of the transcribed texts to compare, contrast, and subsequently cluster themes related to the research questions to interpret the data.

Table 5. *Word frequency list*

Rank	Most frequent content word list	Frequency count (> 50)
1	Listening	954
2	English	675
3	Student	393
4	Skill	380
5	Teacher	355
6	Language	326
7	Test	309
8	IELTS	293
9	Classroom	273
10	Class	261
11	Practice	245
12	Speaking	234
13	Training	202
14	Students	199
15	Skills	194
16	Learning	189
17	Section	181

18	Answer	171
19	Problem	131
20	Teachers	131
21	Teaching	122
22	Vocabulary	120
23	Education	116
25	Course	112
26	Multimedia	106
27	Develop	104
28	Word	96
29	Oral	95
30	Curriculum	91
31	Questions	85
32	Reading	81
33	Level	79
34	Writing	76
35	Pronunciation	74
36	Bangladesh	70
37	Assessment	70
38	Grammar	68
39	Secondary	65
40	Accent	64
41	Communicative	63
42	Communication	62

43	Public	60
44	difficulty	60
45	Focus	58

Here, initially, I have used corpus processing software which has been useful to locate the themes from a huge volume of texts. It helped profoundly to see where the most frequent words and relevant phrases occurred regularly in the context of the spoken texts. This KWIC technique helped me hint at the initial codes for potential themes in the beginning. I then manually explored similarities and relationships between different chunks of the interview data for thematic analysis. To do this process, I started by printing my transcripts of raw data and arrayed the artefacts to collate with transcribed interview data. After that, I highlighted important sections that were relevant to my research questions. Again, I clustered those highlighted sections into different groups based on their similarities and relationship. After that, to excavate into the data, I have grouped the data by identifying the tensions of the statements of the interviewees for contradictions and contextual understanding of the following issues for further analysis. In this way, the potential themes emerged from the data. As I proceeded further, some of these themes generated new sub-themes under each of the major themes. Once the themes were uncovered from the data, I analysed the contents of the themes in order to interpret and make a discussion of them to answer the research questions.

Trustworthiness

As the study is mainly based on qualitative research, its *validity* and *reliability* of the findings require to be considered based on its 'trustworthiness' and 'rigour'. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described that trustworthiness was concerned with the *truth value* of the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data.

I was an English language teacher, a government employee, and so an insider. My relevant teaching knowledge and work experience were supportive for me to decide what to include and what to discard during the research. I am the product of this education system in Bangladesh as I finished my secondary and higher secondary education under this system. However, for my graduate and postgraduate degrees, I went to Aligarh Muslim University in India. After completing both degrees, I came back to Bangladesh and started teaching English at a private university before I joined in Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) under the Ministry

of Education. I then started teaching at the higher secondary level in different colleges. Being a teacher with the experience of teaching students produced by the national curriculum both at higher secondary and tertiary levels, my experience supported me in doing this research. So, as a researcher, the whole thread of engagement provided me with the opportunity to conduct the research. Shenton (2004) argued that the background, qualifications, and experience of the researcher are important to ensure the credibility of qualitative research as the person is the main instrument of data collection and analysis. With data collection and collation, I spent nine months in Bangladesh where my research site was. I prolonged my engagement with the participants in the field. Creswell (2012) recommended that a long stay in the field and several revisits to the participants could help the researcher understand the context and the patterns of the participant groups. I sat several times with my participants during the interviews as in some cases it took multiple meetings to complete the interview. As the participants were from the same city, I met some of them on different informal occasions, which helped me build rapport with them. The other important aspect of the trustworthiness of my findings was my collection of different types of data from a variety of sources that I described in the earlier section. After my data collection, I collated and transcribed the data and had it cross-checked by the participants so that the participants could ensure that their words matched their intention of utterances and that their dialogues were accurately transcribed. I shared the transcribed interviews with the respective participant so that they could easily notice if they needed to make corrections or changes to their opinions. Once I collated and transcribed the data, I had my presentation of findings scrutinised by fellow Bangladeshi researchers to ensure that it was underpinned by evidence from different sources. I focused on presenting detailed dialogues clearly between the interviewees and myself.

I maintained a research logbook, which included the snatches of my sporadic thoughts at once in the field, my notes on several issues, and my interpretive notes about the issues the participants raised during the interviews. I also constantly checked the date and the names of the files while recording by my digital voice recorder as I gave pseudonyms to the interview participants.

A further measure of trustworthiness was that the participants trusted me to be open-minded in sharing their opinions. As explained earlier, the teachers, trainers, and the students who I interviewed gained the confidence to speak up spontaneously during the interview sessions. To cite an example of this: many of them invited me to their homes, sent a friend request on

social media to become my Facebook friend and more importantly, some of them still communicate by email to know about the findings and they are eagerly waiting to read the sections of my thesis in which I interpreted their opinions and where they contributed as a participant.

Another measure of trustworthiness is the availability of critique (Shenton, 2004). During the period of my data collection, I had the opportunity to report the progress of data collection to my supervisor over Skype as a part of regular weekly lab discussion sessions. The fellow Ph.D. students of my lab questioned me extensively as many of the issues raised by the interviewees were new to them due to the context, policies, and methodical differences in English language education. They also forced me to provide a probable interpretation of the data to generate different themes. Sometimes, they also injected me with different but insightful interpretations of the data. I have had multiple opportunities to present my interpreted data based on this study at different conferences. In those conferences, I received critical comments, feedback, and suggestions that helped me go deep into my data and refine my thoughts for the interpretation of the study.

Language, transcription, and translation

Most of the interviews were conducted in *Bangla* as the participants' mother language is *Bangla.* The interviews were recorded by a digital audio recorder. After each recording, I transferred the audio files to my laptop giving separate names for each one. I interviewed 28 participants, and as I mentioned earlier, some of the interviews were very long. So, although I started transcribing while I was collecting data, it took a huge amount of time. It was because I not only transcribed the words verbatim but also did thematic transcription that assessed the texts through the KWIC technique for the most significant themes, and summarised the major contents of what the participants said on different issues. In this way, the identified themes were deeply rooted in the data. Alvesson (2011) illustrated that the process of transcription might lead to a thousand pages; therefore, enormous time must be considered to finish the process. Otherwise, there is a risk that "the interviewer fails to consider quite a lot of what may be interesting and is too much guided by pre-existing ideas or jump to conclusions without carefully having a look at and interpreting the interview material" (Alvesson, 2011, p. 57). Therefore, after the careful and thorough transcription of the data made by the participants related to different themes, I then translated all the major contents of *Bangla* statements into English with careful consideration of keeping the core meaning of what the

participants said. I have recorded the interviews, transcribed them, and cross-checked them with the participants. This member checking is a process to establish validity and credibility in a qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The fellow English teachers who were also expert researchers cross-checked the transcription because peer-scrutiny of the research project is important. Shenton (2004) highlighted the value of opportunities for scrutiny of the project by colleagues, peers, and academics.

I ensured my participants' anonymity. I intend to explain the reason for choosing one of the participants' names as 'Head of the Curriculum". I chose to use his functional title as a pseudonym because it was important to identify him as leading this process. I believe this still preserves his confidentiality as a participant. In the writing of the thesis, I have used some exact *Bangla* words and proverbs. Firstly, to emphasise those *Bangla* words or proverbs in interpretation. Secondly, if some of the *Bangla* proverbs were translated into English, those would change their meaning. So, I intended to capture the implied meaning rather than providing a literal translation. However, I offered a translation in the text or as a footnote.

Chapter Five: The Landscape of English Language Education in Bangladesh: Past to Present

Introduction

This chapter reports and discusses the perspectives and experiences of policymakers and secondary school teachers concerning English language education. The introductory chapter and the review of existing literature indicated that there were serious concerns about the effectiveness of English language teaching. However, as mentioned earlier, the actual research that has been carried out in Bangladesh in this field is sketchy. By investigating the understandings, intentions, and expectations of policymakers and the practices, intentions, and frustrations of classroom teachers, this chapter provides a broad and detailed account of the aims of English language education as well as of the problems that obstruct the realisation of those aims.

It begins with examining the development of English education in Bangladesh, drawing on policy and curriculum documents, and the understanding of current policymakers. It then examines the stakeholders' understandings, expectations, and experiences of the CLT approach to English language teaching. Finally, it reports stakeholders' attitudes to the need for oral competencies.

A knowledge of historical development is useful in understanding a situational context. If we know where we have been, we often can perceive where we are and where we need to reach. The official website of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education has described the historical situation before the colonial period in Bangladesh, stating, "From ancient times to the Middle Ages, indigenous education was in vogue in this sub-continent. Primary education was home-centred followed by Madrasha and 'Toll' (Higher education) education. Parsi, Sanskrit, and Pali languages were used as the medium of education. Education then was based on practical needs along with religious education. With the coming of British rule, the current education system based on practical needs developed" (p.1). The words of Macaulay quoted in Chapter One highlight that these 'practical needs' appeared to be based on the administrative needs of the colonial rule.

Subsequently, the influence of the colonial legacy has still a considerable impact on teaching and learning, practices, and the policy of English language education in independent Bangladesh. Bangladesh. The influence is perhaps heightened rather than reduced by the

impact of globalisation. The residual effects of history indicate the causes of why Bangladesh is currently facing problems to implement its current National Curriculum 2012 for English education in accordance with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2010. The goals stated in NEP 2010 and the curriculum reflect the country's aspirations to become a middle-income country by 2021. However, there are multiple disconnects between what is in policy and what occurs in current curriculum resources, classroom teaching-learning process, and assessment in the secondary context. The National Education Policy emphasises English language proficiency for access to global knowledge and economy (Ministry of Education Bangladesh, 2010). For this reason, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) revised its secondary curriculum in 2013 for English education in light of the National Curriculum 2012 for English.

Consequently, the only textbook for the whole country at the secondary level, *English for Today,* has been developed for Grades 6 to 10 to help students attain competency in all four skills of English language − listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, there is a significant disconnection between the curriculum, classroom practice, and assessment. Although oral skills − listening and speaking − are included in the existing secondary English curriculum, skills in these two areas are often completely ignored in classroom practice and are not included in the assessment. Therefore, the achievement of the desired competency in secondary English language education is being interrupted. If the secondary curriculum, classroom teaching, and learning activities and assessment system are not coherently aligned, the aspirations of the National Curriculum 2012 for English are unlikely to be achieved. This issue is further discussed in the following sections.

Colonial legacy in English language education in Bangladesh

As the policymakers and secondary English teachers from both urban and rural contexts are major players in the development of English language education, I interviewed members of both groups as the participants in this study. I asked them about their understanding of English language education policy, classroom practice of oral skills, and the apparent disconnect between policy and practice in Bangladesh. I have reported findings based on these interviews, and government and non-government reports and documents, and related them to other recent research findings. In this section, I have examined data relating to the continuing colonial legacy that influences the curriculum and the teaching and learning of

English, and the more recent influence of donor agencies, such as UK Aid, the British Council, the Asian Development Bank, and the World Bank.

In an extended interview, Hamid, who has been working with the National Curriculum and Textbook Board for the last 15 years in Dhaka as an English-subject adviser, discussed the colonial legacy. The first question that I asked him was, "What was the teaching method for English education since our Independence?" Although the question was not directly linked to the colonial legacy in English education, it was a comfortable start for the interview session and was intended to develop a historical snapshot of the methods of English teaching in Bangladesh. The following questions, therefore, sought information about colonial approaches to English language teaching and the ways successive political regimes influenced the status of the English language in the curriculum and initiatives for changes in methods of English teaching. In reply to my first question, Hamid immediately mentioned the colonial history of the National English curriculum:

> No, no, we did not introduce the Grammar-Translation Method. It was introduced by the British Raj in this sub-continent. At that time, there was no known method for language teaching except the Grammar-Translation Method.

Later on, he further discussed how different methods had been introduced until CLT was adopted, and he emphasised the current importance of the English language in the curriculum. In discussing the colonial legacy of English teaching methods, Hamid cited the work of Professor Dr. Michael West, who, in 1920, was the first Principal of Dhaka Teachers' Training College and also became the Dean of the Faculty of Education of Dhaka University when it was established in 1921. Hamid said:

> Dr. Michael West wanted to introduce the *Direct Method* for English language teaching. But seeing the condition, school teachers, and their competence, he realised and understood the problem of teaching English through the *Direct Method*.[10] Then he developed a method called *Reading Method*.[11] That became popular all over the world later on.

[10] Maximilian Berlitz of Germany was the initiator of *Direct Method*. In this method, the fundamental motto of a language learning is to learn the target language very much like the learning of the first language without any translation between first and second languages.

[11] Michael West was the originator of *Reading Method*. While teaching in India, he understood that the ability of reading fluently in English was more important than speaking in English. For this reason, he developed *Reading Method* accentuating comprehension as the main aim rather than the production of language.

Hamid then explains how, after the departure of the British colonial force in 1947, English studies were transformed in the sub-continent, including the region that became Bangladesh. English was accepted by the then Pakistan Government as an official language. Moreover, the curriculum for English language education adopted the *Grammar-translation method* instead of the *Direct Method* based on the *structural syllabus* in 1954. Hamid stated:

> Anyway, only in 1957, the structural syllabus was introduced that is also known as a grammatical syllabus prepared by Ronald McCain for the East Pakistan School Textbook Board. It is now called the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) in Bangladesh.

Hamid's statement highlights how English language education in Bangladesh was determined by being a part of Pakistan and so was influenced by the structural syllabus which actually underpinned Grammar-Translation-based English education. Later on, English education in independent Bangladesh took another turn. After the independence of Bangladesh, *Bangla*, as a language, became a symbol for Bangladeshis both for their national identity and their struggle against suppression and injustice. Therefore, it was expected that *Bangali Nationalism* would underpin language and education policies in a newly liberated country. Hamid stated this change:

> After Independence, the first Education Commission known as the Kudrat-e-Khuda Education commission was formed in 1972. The commission proposed that the curriculum required revision. The commission submitted its report in 1974. The Commission proposed to teach the English language from Grade 6. The report of the Commission was formulated and based on the socio-economic and political conditions and cultural heritage of the country.

Hamid's viewpoint indicates that the prioritisation of *Bangla* relegated the English language to a state of less importance. His statement aligns with the research of Hamid and Baldauf (2008) who identified the lost status of the English language as a medium of educational instruction at all levels after independence in 1971. However, Rasheed, an adviser of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board who had worked as an English teacher-educator for 20 years at different government colleges, explained that there was a change to the status of the English language from negligence to the importance of its linguistic need. There was also a revision to the English curriculum in 1976 when the English Teaching Taskforce

Commission was formed, but there was no immediate change from a structural syllabus to a functional syllabus. Rasheed stated:

> In the year 1976, the English Teaching Taskforce Commission opens the opportunity to switch from the Grammar-Translation approach to a functional approach to learn English by adopting a Functional syllabus. Nonetheless, the shifting was slow and the previous hangover prevailed until the 1990s when a jointly ventured project named English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) came into function resulting in the inclusion of communicative tasks to teach and learn English in the textbooks named *English for Today* for school and college levels. English was upheld as a compulsory subject again from Grade 1 for its communicative need for education, trade and economy, and international job market potential.

Both Hamid's and Rasheed's statements indicate that the change in methodological focus and policy of English language education was slow and unsteady in both the eras immediately preceding and following Bangladesh's independence. This was due to successive changes in the political regime. As noted in Chapter Two, the impact of politics is also discussed in other published research. However, Rahim, who is one of the Curriculum experts for English textbooks, mentioned another reason for this slow and unsteady change in policy and teaching approaches. He stated:

> I coordinated the textbook for higher secondary. Some of the NCTB subject advisors of the English textbook Prof. Shahin Kabir and Prof. Mostain Billah wanted to follow the traditional literature-based English textbook for English language learning.

Rahim's use of the term 'traditional' indicates the continuing impact of the colonial way of teaching and learning English through the means of English literature. This idea was introduced in the colonial context to establish the supremacy of English culture and society in the region. By stating some of the names of the English textbook developers, Rahim's words signal that being the product of the English literature-based language learners, most of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board advisors still lean towards that traditional approach to English education. However, Hamid argued that the process and aim of the study of language and the study of literature are different in terms of purpose and focus. He said:

> For teaching and learning the English language at the secondary level, the paradigm has shifted from literature to language in the sub-continent along with other EFL countries in Asia for a communicative purpose. However, some influential

> policymakers do not realise that. They suggest that we should learn English through the study of literature. But we are trying to make them understand this issue that the study of language and the study of literature has different focuses. The teaching and learning of English literary texts for improving critical understanding are different from teaching and learning of English for communicative competence.

Hamid's statement signals that the policy related to English language education in Bangladesh has timely shifted its focus to serve the practical need of the country for learning English. However, Hamid further indicates that the implementation process of the policy is hindered as some of the policymakers have a colonial mindset. So, they are reluctant to change their age-old notion of learning English by studying literature. They fail to realise that learning English for communicative competence and learning English literature to improve the English language are different. Hamid's opinion renews the ontological tension between the study of the English language and the study of English literature for language proficiency. A number of research studies acknowledge that 'Applied Linguistics' has emerged as a separate branch of study to guide both teachers and students on how to learn second languages and to explore how languages and human communication work (Harris, 2001). This branch has evolved significantly in the last two decades for teaching, learning, and researching languages (Akther & Siddiqua, 2016; Grabe, 2010). Billah (2017) expressed his opinion differently by saying that literary texts can be used in some cases if the texts can serve the need for interactive language exercises with authentic English language input to add an extra scope for the students to practice English more and more. However, in the advocacy of literature-based language learning, one of those influential English textbook experts who were involved in the policy-making process tried to maintain the traditional Grammar-translation approach for better English learning. This influential textbook expert argued by writing an article in a national English Daily newspaper (Billah, 2017) that the way they learned English, the secondary students could also learn in the same way. Hamid referred to that response in his account:

> Some people think that, for example,…I do not mention the name…I won't mention his name. Recently, he has written a newspaper article saying that CLT is a complete failure in Bangladesh. He mentioned that they learned English through the Grammar-Translation method and they learned good English at that time. Now the students are weak in English and they don't have a basic grammatical sense of English. So, he

> advises us to bring back the grammar-translation method again. We are facing this sort of disagreement about the methodological issue.

Rumel is an expert IELTS trainer who has been training IELTS preparatory students for the last 15 years explained the condition contrary to the advocates of the literature-based grammar-translation approach to English education that Hamid posited earlier. Rumel shared his experience by saying:

> The irony of English education in Bangladesh is that the perception of learning the English language through authentic and interactive English language input has not yet been sprouted. We still follow the traditional rote learning of rules to learn English based on the grammar-translation method.

Moreover, Rahim further emphasized that Bangladesh has to make its English language education policy compatible with the need and skills required for the world:

> After 47 years of our independence, we have come to this point for English education. We have also a plan for the future to prepare a supplementary textbook separately on listening and speaking skills and to distribute 50% of total marks (25 marks each) on oral skills to make our next generations fluent in English. We should remember that English is the global language of the world.

Hamid highlighted that it was difficult to change this colonial notion of English language education for political reasons:

> True…the problem is that the old school of thought advocates literature-based textbooks for English teaching and learning. The followers of this old school of thought are the products of literature-based English education. Some of them are renowned as literary experts in Bangladesh. Moreover, they are politically very influential in the decision-making process. Some of them have a very good connection with the Government. For this reason, they have an influence on designing the contents of English textbooks.

Hamid's statement indicates that some of the aforementioned textbook developers are politically powerful and they can directly influence the overall decision-making process in terms of syllabus design for English textbooks. The political influence on language education is not a new phenomenon in the Bangladeshi context. Earlier, he commented on this issue, saying that the country's English language education policy was always guided by the

policymakers of a pro-ruling party and elite groups associated with the existing government. Despite resistance from the advocates of the Grammar-Translation approach, a CLT approach was embraced in alignment with perceived linguistic needs for global participation.

The aspirations of the National Curriculum (1995; 2012) have been supported by projects on English language education from Donor/BANA[12] countries. However, the concept of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has not been properly understood by the stakeholders in English language education in Bangladesh. It appears that the ground is not ready to absorb the CLT approach. Philosophical conflicts about English language teaching methods have generated confusion about CLT and particularly about the necessity of oral skills. I discuss the consequent multiple disconnections that are evident in teaching, learning, and assessment later in this chapter.

The current situation in secondary English language education

The participants reported different opinions about the quality of current English language education in Bangladesh. First of all, I interviewed the Head of Curriculum as he was the person who officially circulated, monitored and evaluated the curriculum-related decisions that used to come from the curriculum committee. To start the discussion, my first question to the Head of the NCTB was, "What are the policies that you have taken in your current national curriculum 2012 to ensure effective English education"? This question was intended to help me understand the perceptions of the top policymakers. I planned this to parallel my interviews with the people on the ground who were the secondary teachers both in urban and rural areas. I intended to see if there was any gap or disconnection between top-down and bottom-up opinions about the effectiveness of current English language education and, if so, what were the issues that hindered the quality of English language education. In this process of discussion, the Head of the NCTB stated the following about the initiatives of the government:

> The government could not focus on these issues as far as the main challenge is to appoint and retain sufficient skilled English teachers. As there are diverse job

[12] BANA are those countries where English is taught as a part of state educational system, such as Britain, USA and Australia. The coinage of BANA countries was introduced by Adrian Holliday in1994 in relation to the transfer of ideas about CLT from these countries to the non-native English countries without considering the local context.

> opportunities for English graduates in the country, a significant number of English teachers switch their job for better benefits and salaries.

The Head of the NCTB also emphasised the ongoing plans of the government to ensure not only the quality of English language education but also the overall quality of education as it is connected to the aspirations to become a middle-income country:

> Our government has handled this issue quite effectively by nationalising most of the schools and increasing the salaries and benefits of the teachers. I can say that the government is successful in this regard. Moreover, we have to fulfill *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* that was adopted by all member states of the United Nations in 2015. If possible, we intend to be a middle-income country by 2024, ensuring quality education to achieve this target.

The above statements of the Head of the NCTB signal that the problems of appointing and retaining sufficient skilled teachers are some of the major obstacles he faces in ensuring quality English language education and monitoring the implementation process of the curriculum from his position on behalf of the government. Moreover, he suggests that the government could not focus on the issues earlier that would help improve the quality of English language education, as there were challenges to appoint and retain skilled English teachers. Besides, he emphasises that the diverse job opportunities, with better benefits and better salaries than being a secondary English teacher that exist for English graduates nationwide, are major obstacles to appoint and retain English teachers. However, his government has the motivation to address these issues as the country has signed the UN resolution to attain the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

However, it can be argued that the situation is not as straightforward as he said. There are many contextual factors that cause problems. One of the problems is the socio-economic differences between the schools in urban areas and those in rural areas. Al Amin (2017) claims that deep-rooted socio-economic factors are impacting on appointment and retention of English language teachers. On top of that, the ratio of the appointment of English teachers is not the same in rural and urban contexts. The rate of both appointing and retaining teachers is less in rural schools than in their urban counterparts. The main reason, as Al Amin (2017) found for the difference in retention rates, is that although the teachers in urban areas have a similar salary structure to rural teachers, they often overcome their financial constraints by

engaging in coaching-business[13] or private tutoring at home apart from their regular teaching job at schools. For this reason, many of them often did not think of changing their job for financial or other types of benefits.

Moreover, it is comparatively easy to retain and appoint English teachers in urban schools in most cases as they like to live and teach in the cities of its cosmopolitan facilities that support their lifestyle and career. The Head of the NCTB also argued that to achieve the *Sustainable Development Goals* for the country, it is necessary to assure quality education and that the government is focusing on the existing challenges:

> At present, our prime challenge is to ensure the quality of English language education. The government also focuses on this issue; hence, it is working on teaching oral skills for English learning along with reading and writing, the teacher-student ratio in the class, teachers' training, the appointment of subject-based teachers, providing digital content for teaching and learning, and improving ICT facilities to utilize multimedia-based education.

In interviews, twelve teachers from both rural and urban areas also reported that the quality of English education could be improved if the issues such as the teacher-student ratio, class sizes, scarcity of teachers' training, properly appointed subject-based English teachers, and provision of digital contents and ICT facilities were resolved. For example, similarly to the Head of the NCTB, Shamima, an urban secondary teacher, talked about the necessity of multimedia-based teaching and learning for quality English language education. Shamima commented:

> The teaching and learning process becomes a more lively and interactive mode in the classroom when multimedia-based content is used. Instead of a chalk-n-talk process, students learn more effectively in an audio-visual environment. I think if the audio-visual process occurs in the classroom, the learning of the students may become long-lasting.

Many urban schools are increasingly equipped with ICT facilities and multimedia classrooms, and some rural schools are also equipped with ICT-based classrooms. More detail on the outcomes of ICT-based classrooms is discussed later in this chapter. However, not all rural schools and all urban schools, especially those in underprivileged areas, are well-

[13] The *coaching business* is supplementary tutoring that is termed by some scholars as "shadow education". It is outside of formal schooling and there is significant financial gain based on it.

equipped with ICT facilities as Al Amin (2017) indicated. At present, among 19,847 secondary schools in Bangladesh, 16,859 schools now have some computers in their schools, and 15,085 have multimedia to use ICT in their classroom practices (BANBEIS, 2016). Taher, a teacher from such rural schools, talked about the role of ICT facilities in the classroom:

> As the classrooms have been equipped with multimedia facilities, it is now easier than earlier to make the classroom interactive and increase the attention of the students to learning.

On top of that, secondary English teachers have also raised some other issues that are barriers to quality English education. Yunus, a rural English teacher who is teaching English for the last ten years, added another issue as a barrier to quality teaching. He mentioned:

> There is no scarcity of teachers for other subjects but English in schools. For this reason, we have to conduct five classes a day. It exhausts us and deteriorates our quality of teaching.

The exhausting overload of classes, according to Yunus, is caused by the insufficient number of English language teachers in rural areas in comparison to teachers for other subjects. However, research in other countries stated that conducting five classes was not considered over workload (Ingvarson et al., 2005). The scenario might be different for Yunus due to the excessive number of students to deal with per class. This situation also highlighted the issue of appointing and retaining English language teachers in rural schools. In contrast, both Shahnaz and Nurul, who were Assistant Teachers and had been teaching English for the last fifteen years in a well-reputed secondary school in the city, repeatedly stated that the actual time for teaching the English language is insufficient as a language class should be interactive based on different communicative tasks. This situation is similar to many rural schools. Solaiman, an assistant teacher who worked in a remote school far away from the main city for the last fifteen years, also reported the allocation of time as a barrier to effective English education. The teachers argued that thirty minutes per class is not enough. It is difficult to deliver effective teaching of the English language in the classroom. The following participants corroborated:

> Shahnaz: To conduct pair works or group works on communicative tasks, the duration of an English class should be at least 1 hour. However, at our school, the

duration of the class is only 30 minutes. Moreover, during this time frame, a significant amount of time is spent on maintaining classroom discipline resulting in even less time to make a class interactive for language learning.

Nurul: We face a shortage of time for a class duration. English language classrooms should be at a length of 1 hour to ensure effective language learning through an interactive process. But we get only 30 minutes for an English class. The roll-call session takes half of the class time and we cannot conduct the class properly for effective learning.

Solaiman: Insufficient class hour is a problem. The reality is that we have to follow the routine of everyday classes and if we want to conduct an English class beyond the time it will be a problem for other classes.

Faruq: The main problem is the duration of an English class for practising CLT approach.

On the other hand, Mahbub and Taher, two other experienced secondary teachers in urban and rural schools, respectively, identified exam-focused English education as the major barrier to effective learning of English. Mahbub ironically stated this:

> All the students and guardian runs after [নগদ নারায়ণ] (instant achievement)…
> They have a desire to achieve good marks and good exam results rather than learning English for life or a career.

Taher was more straightforward on this issue than Mahbub, and he was grumpy with the prevalent attitude of the students for their excessive focus on getting a GPA 5 (considered the highest Grade Point Average in public exams). He stated:

> Students want to learn English to pass the exams and achieve a GPA of 5. They are not interested to learn English for their proficiency or to learn English for their future career not only in Bangladesh but also abroad.

Therefore, according to the participants from both top-level policy people and field-level secondary English teachers, the indication is that there are hindrances to achieve quality

secondary English language education related to both policy implementation levels. Despite that, curriculum policymakers and teachers seem to put emphasis on achieving quality English language education as a means to put the country on the way to achieving sustainable development. It is perceived that quality English language education can widen students' chances of jobs and careers both at home and abroad. Hamid and Erling (2016) also found this view of English language education as it is associated with knowledge, technology, employment, income, and social mobility, irrespective of rural or urban contexts.

In the following sections, I discuss issues related to a CLT approach as the interview participants suggested that the proper implementation of CLT could play a pivotal role in generating quality in English language education. I also intend to discuss CLT in the curriculum, classroom practice, and assessment procedure.

What is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Bangladesh?

The commencement of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach was proposed by the NCTB policy in 1995 being a prevalent and acknowledged approach to teach and learn a foreign or second language. Hamid recalled:

> So, at that time, people were working with the English language curriculum in Bangladesh. They also, particularly the expatriate experts of the British Council, preferred the idea of CLT to be introduced. Still now, Communicative Language Teaching [CLT] is the preferred method of teaching English.

Taher (rural secondary teacher) also spoke about the advent of CLT in Bangladesh:

> This change of method in teaching English is the demand of the current time. It is like shifting from analog to digital mode. We, the teachers, used to be the active provider of lectures in the classroom. Now, for this method [CLT], we, the teachers, are in passive mode as the students can play an active role in making the class interactive.

Taher talks about the shift to CLT as an unavoidable pressure of the global importance of the English language and the demands for a communicative form of English. His comparison of the change − from analog to digital − suggests both the necessity of the change and the fact that it is beyond human control. It is noteworthy that he talks about how teachers are in a passive mode in a CLT classroom, whereas CLT, by definition, is an interactive teaching process. However, what Taher highlights here is his perception that a teacher, by definition of CLT, is no longer in absolute charge of the class being the sage or provider of knowledge.

The teacher has reasonably become the facilitator of learning activities for the students. Considering this change from the age-old role of a teacher as the sage at the centre of a classroom to the facilitator of a classroom, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (1995) projected "learning by doing" as the key concept of the CLT approach. In this regard, the NCTB policy on the secondary level stated:

> English needs to be recognised as an essential work-oriented skill that is needed if the employment, development, and educational needs of the country are to be met successfully. English should, therefore, be taught as something to be used, rather than as something to be talked about (NCTB, 1995, p. 135-136).

However, CLT remains a much-debated issue since its inception in Bangladesh English language education. Drawing on the voices of the participants who have witnessed the history of CLT in Bangladesh, I intend to discuss this debate.

Putting the cart before the horse

The focus of English language education in Bangladesh is predominantly based on reading and writing skills rather than the oral skills that are deemed as core skills of the English language. In a discussion with a rural teacher and one of the IELTS trainers, both of the interviewees suggested that Bangladesh walked in the opposite direction of language education in implementing the CLT approach to learn English. In this regard, Mahbub shared his understanding:

> The English learning of the students has been focused on only two skills – reading and writing – until 2015 without listening and speaking skills. We were following the reverse direction of language education as it should follow the sequence in order of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Rumel, who is an IELTS trainer, also expressed similar views to Mahbub. He reported:

> The irony of English education in Bangladesh is that the perception of learning the English language through authentic and interactive English language input has not yet been sprouted. So, we still follow the traditional rote memorisation to learn English. For this reason, after studying English from Grades 1 to 12 and even finishing a bachelor's degree in English, the students still struggle with listening and speaking skills when they come for the IELTS preparatory course. I think the main reason for the struggle is that as listening and speaking are not included either for learning or

> assessment at their secondary and higher secondary levels, students face it for the first time during the IELTS preparatory course.

Rumel's statement indicates that he is the product of traditional English language education based on rote memorisation. His words further assert that due to the absence of oral skills in the English learning process, students who come for the IELTS preparatory course after their higher secondary qualification, or even after obtaining a bachelor's degree in English, fail to understand both listening and speaking skills during the IELTS preparatory course. Rumel's statement also signals that the problem is an unfortunate by-product of the prevalent problem of English language education in Bangladesh. Both the English language policy and practice of the country do not follow the basic sequence of second language learning that starts with listening and ends in writing competence, whereas numerous language theorists (Brown & Lee, 2015; Harmer, 2015; Richards, 2015; Rost, 2016; Saville-Troike, 2012; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012) claim that oral skills precede orthographic skills. Oral skills for English language education are present in the policy of the NCTB English curriculum since 1995 in Bangladesh. However, oral skills were absent from secondary textbooks until 2013. Although oral skills are now present in secondary textbooks based on the National Curriculum 2012, they do not get similar treatment in urban and rural classroom contexts. This disparity is further discussed in the following section.

Urban-rural contextual inequity in the CLT approach

The differences between urban and rural contexts are very important to discuss as the gaps between the two are widening (Alamgir, 2017). Moreover, most of the students are in rural areas as 66% of the total population lives in rural areas (Al Amin, 2017). The discrepancies between urban and rural contexts in Bangladesh are evidenced not only in social and economic conditions but also in the quality of English language education. The CLT approach is mandated throughout Bangladesh, including all rural schools. The disparity in English language education between urban and rural areas is described by participants from both policy and practice levels. Although the practice of oral skills (listening & speaking) is a must for an English class based on the CLT approach, it does not happen in many secondary schools in rural areas. Rahim, a curriculum developer of NCTB who visits both rural and urban schools, found that rural schools did not practice oral skills in classrooms. He stated:

> Most of the urban schools internally practice and assess listening skills. But rural schools neither practice nor assess listening skills in the classroom. There is a socio-

economic disparity between urban and rural realities in Bangladesh that affects ICT skills and pedagogical expertise of the English teachers in rural schools to implement oral skills as an integral practice of the CLT approach.

Hamid (English-subject adviser of NCTB) vividly expressed this situation in his words:

> But not all the teachers have reached that level to collect materials and use those materials [online listening materials] in a classroom properly and competently. Maybe some urban teachers can do it, but many teachers in rural schools are not competent enough to do it. They do not have much access to the internet. They also lack much knowledge of IT.

Due to this socio-economic difference, many rural teachers do not have internet access. They do not even have other sources apart from their lone English textbooks to develop their own English or pedagogical knowledge. Yunus, a rural English teacher from a school where there were no internet facilities, explained:

> There are no internet facilities in my area. Besides, we do not have any access to other English textbooks or materials apart from the NCTB's *English for Today* textbook. When we have the chance to have access to the internet and other sources of [English] listening materials, we, the teachers, will also improve.

Some other English language teachers from rural schools also stated that there were huge socio-economic and educational gaps between urban and rural contexts:

> Kamal: There is a serious scarcity of good English teachers in rural schools. Those who are good English teachers do not want to stay in rural areas. Moreover, in terms of the quality of teachers and students, there is a huge gap between city and rural situations. In a rural area, both teachers and students are backdated.

> Taher: Rural schools are far behind urban schools for English education. Students in rural areas are backdated. They are not up-to-date like urban students. Even a student in Grade 5 or 6 from an urban school is better than a student in Grade 9 or 10 from a rural school in terms of English Proficiency.

> Solaiman: Many students are in class 6 still do not understand the difference between a 'vowel' and a 'consonant' or the meaning of

some basic everyday English words.

The awareness of such disparity was also articulated not only by the teachers of rural schools but also by some of the teachers at urban schools. Anam, one of those urban school teachers, expressed his viewpoint:

> In urban schools, there are good teachers. However, there are no good teachers in rural schools; whereas if you count in total, you will see that nearly 80% of the secondary students are from rural schools. So, to improve the quality of overall English education, we have to think about the majority of the students who are studying in rural schools.

Ismail, a rural teacher, considered that the urban socio-economic context provides an opportunity for developing oral fluency in English. He stated:

> For English learning, I will say the environment is important. In urban schools, students are better in fluency and listening to English as they get chances to practice and receive English from their surroundings. Rural students do not get any such opportunity outside their classroom.

Due to this lack of exposure to the English language, rural students are outpaced by their urban counterparts in English language learning. Mamun, an English language teacher from a rural school, identified this issue and recounted:

> The guidelines − how to conduct all four skills − are provided by the NCTB English textbook in different chapters, but you know…this is a rural area…students struggle with the basics of the English language. I can personally say that a student in Grade 6 from an urban school knows better about the basics of the English language in comparison to an 8^{th} or 9^{th}-grade student in a rural school. If you also look into the results of public examinations, you can see that the pass rate of rural schools is very low in English papers compared to urban schools.

Shahid, an urban English teacher, further pointed out the issue of providing training to rural teachers to teach oral skills. He mentioned that although there were teachers like him in urban schools who were capable of teaching listening and speaking skills in the classroom, rural English teachers did not have the proper training for teaching oral skills. He stated:

> Officially, English is taught in Bangladesh as a foreign language, but in fact, it is accepted as a second language. However, we have a shortage of sufficient well-trained

> English teachers to communicate in English to teach oral skills in a secondary classroom. If you go to rural areas, you will find that the situation is more incapacitating in rural schools.

Shahid's statement regarding English, whether it is a foreign or a de facto second language in Bangladesh, is still a problematic issue. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (2012a) documented the teaching and learning of English language as a foreign language by stating, "Currently the role of English as a foreign language in grooming the school-goers as human resources compatible for a digitised society is also significant" (p. 35). However, English is taught in Bangladesh from Grade 1 for all three streams of its education (Bangla, English, and Madrasha) and the language is used parallel to the first language −*Bangla* − in some communities and the language is also the language of the legal system, business, and corporate correspondence. Now the question arises: if English is a foreign language in Bangladesh then why it is taught from Grade 1? Why are other foreign languages, such as Arabic (which is closely connected to the religious, social context and foreign remittance of the country), Korean, or Japanese (the languages that are closely connected to the export-based trade and commerce) not taught like the English language? However, although it is not explicitly documented in the National Education Policy 2010 or National Curriculum Policy as a second language, the language is implicitly mandated as a second language (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Since English is the only recognised language other than Bangla and the population is committed to learning, some national and international researchers have considered English as a second language (Hamid & Honan, 2012; Rahman & Pandian, 2018; Rasheed, 2013). Although English is becoming a second language, it is traditionally based on British English with some recent American influence through media. However, the language in Bangladesh has become neither a British nor an American but a Bangladeshi version of English, which is also evident in the lessons of secondary textbooks, although traditionally the secondary textbooks have tried to follow the standard of British English (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a). It is developing into a sort of customised English with a Bangladeshi flavour, which is emerging as another variety of *World Englishes* (Al Amin, 2017; Kabir, 2018). Although Shahed begins to despair of his above-cited statement regarding the incapacitating situation in rural schools, Nurul, an urban English teacher, seems optimistic. Nurul thinks this disparity between urban and rural schools can be mitigated soon if the rural schools are also given internet facilities with multimedia classrooms, and proper training is given to the rural English teachers. He said:

> In Bangladesh, I think it is possible if we try. If the Internet and multimedia classroom facilities are provided and if you properly train the rural teachers, then the urban-rural gap can be minimised. Now the government has taken up many projects on ICT to digitise classroom teaching and learning process in all secondary schools. In the near future, internet facilities can be available at a union council[14] in rural areas.

It is relevant to comment here that all the participants of the study are concerned about the urban-rural disparity in English language education, which is also evident in the results of SSC and HSC public exams. Alamgir (2018) also stated that "students of rural districts also lag behind their fellows in the cities in terms of pass rate and getting the highest GPA 5" (p. 8). Nonetheless, according to Nurul's optimism and the government's ongoing projects related to ICT in Education (Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology Bangladesh, 2009) highlight that the government of Bangladesh has taken an agenda to implement ICT in all sectors, including education, which signals that the situation may be improved in future. However, before the improvement can occur as expected by Nurul, there are some unresolved issues, such as equity assurance of students' performance, teachers' ability, availability of educational resources, and the providence of ICT facilities for classrooms. These are some of the major challenges in efforts to minimize the urban-rural disparity in English language education: rural students have long been disadvantaged with almost no path to quality education.

Incomplete CLT package (without oral skills)

"Tell me and I forget,
Teach me and I may remember,
Involve me and I learn."

− Benjamin Franklin

The above quote from Benjamin Franklin succinctly embodies the participatory nature of learner-centred classroom activities that can be linked to the CLT teaching method. It also suggests active involvement and participation of the learners through the oral skills of the CLT approach. In Bangladesh, communicative English tasks have been made available by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in secondary English textbooks to follow the CLT approach to learn English since 1997. However, the absence of both listening and speaking skills in

[14] Union councils are the smallest rural administrative and local government units in Bangladesh.

practice and assessment has made the CLT approach incomplete as there is repeated evidence that learners are not involved practically in the classroom. The following participants who have been working in the making of policies for English language education for a decade have accentuated this incompleteness in their statements:

> Rashid: Although we designed our English textbooks in 1997 following the CLT approach, we could not bring all four skills in teaching and assessment until 2012. Since 2012, for the first time, orals skills are brought into classroom teaching and internal assessments of schools in secondary English education.

> Rahim: Although we adopted the CLT approach to English language education since 1996, we are not able to follow this approach until now. English language education still clings to reading and writing skills via rote memorisation. In CLT, all four skills should be practised in the classroom for language education but policy since 1996 but not in classroom practice. This gap has been created for several reasons.

Both Rashid and Rahim suggest that there are "reasons" behind this incomplete implementation of the CLT approach. Among "reasons", Rahim's focus is more on the absence of integrating the four skills of the English language in the classroom as well as in the assessment process. However, although Rashid said earlier that all four skills were brought into classrooms and internal assessment process by the schools since 2012, Rahim argues that most of the schools, especially many schools in rural areas, neither brought oral skills into classrooms nor adopted a CLT approach and cling to reading and writing through rote learning remains as usual. Some of these "reasons" have also been explored by the Head of NCTB as he identifies that there is a need for providing training to the English language teachers, and there is also a scarcity of trained English teachers for a complete implementation of the CLT approach. At the same time, a positive shift is also required as the prevailing attitude of senior teachers is not helpful towards the CLT approach. The Head of NCTB stated:

> There is a scarcity of two types of teachers − English teachers as well as well-trained English teachers. Besides, there is a perception among the senior teachers that through the CLT approach, students do not learn the correct use of English both orally and

written. They also think that CLT is a failed method in Bangladesh for English language education.

In this statement, the Head of NCTB accentuates the issue of teacher training and the lack of trained teachers. However, it might be argued that the training for English language teachers does not ensure that they will apply their training-driven knowledge into practice. The teaching of the English language through the CLT approach largely depends on teachers' willingness. This issue is further discussed in Chapter Six. Furthermore, the term "senior teachers" used by the Head of NCTB indicates those teachers who have been in service for a long time. As there is no pre-service teacher training scheme in Bangladesh, young teachers who are new at service receive guidance from those teachers who are considered senior teachers. They play the role of an inductor for the junior teachers. The Head of NCTB's reference to "perception among senior teachers" seems to indicate that senior teachers have more authority in the decision-making processes in schools and their opinion carries more weight with the school authority. The comment also seems to indicate that senior teachers are those who are reluctant to have training as they are reluctant to change their methodological approach.

Pertinently, Rahim also suggests that senior teachers focus more on correct forms of English rather than the function of English. However, the concept of *correct English* is a problematic one. It implies a notion of grammatical correctness of English. It indicates the grammatical norm of Standard English, which is set by *Inner Circle* countries (Bershidsky, 2019 March 2; Hamid & Baldauf, 2013; Jenkins, 2006; Kabir, 2018; Kachru, 2005) of English; mainly British and American forms of Standard English. Since English is considered a *lingua franca* and labelled as nobody's but everyone's international language, varieties of World Englishes cannot be termed as "incorrect English" but rather as different forms of English (Hamid & Baldauf, 2013; Jenkins, 2006; Kachru, 2005; Newman, 1996). So, according to the Head of NCTB, senior teachers in Bangladesh are unnecessarily concerned about what is *correct English* and could consider other forms of Englishes as different rather than *incorrect*, The teachers can teach their students to navigate between mainstream English and other non-native Englishes for learning grammatical rules of English.

Moreover, senior teachers' notion of *correct English* problematises the implementation of CLT in classrooms. Rahim also talked about senior teachers' perception of CLT as a "failed method." He talked about their perception that explicit knowledge of grammar helps learners

produce correct sentences resulting in their doing well in examinations. However, the examinations only involve writing and reading assessment, whereas a CLT approach relies on an implicit way of learning grammar, mainly focusing on its functional use. So, the absence of sufficient oral practices for teaching functional grammar and the absence of means to assess oral skills in the examination has crippled CLT in Bangladesh and created senior teachers' perception that it is a failed method. This idea is further discussed later in this chapter.

However, Hamid pointed directly to a lack of technical support to conduct listening and speaking practices and of teachers trained in how to conduct oral practices in the classroom. Therefore, he claimed, teachers are not confident enough to conduct oral practices in a classroom. He stated:

> It is not possible to implement oral skills in the classroom following the CLT approach. The main reason is that there is no audio-lingual support in the classrooms, with no trained teachers who can conduct listening and speaking skills in a classroom. Teachers also have a lack of confidence to implement these oral skills in a classroom.

In addition to these policy people, both the interviewed teachers and the IELTS trainers also noted that CLT had not been implemented completely at secondary and higher secondary levels until 2015. In this connection, Anam, an urban teacher, stated:

> Definitely, the inclusion of oral skills is appreciable, especially for the complete implementation of the CLT approach inside the classroom. Besides, when we make conversation in English with the students, they get more motivation to speak up in English.

Mahbub, another urban teacher, indicated earlier that the implementation of CLT is not only incomplete for English language education in Bangladesh but also follows a reverse sequence to that which is ideal for language education. Shahed, an urban teacher, also argued that without oral skills, English teaching is not complete and acknowledged that he was puzzled by the long absence of oral practices although CLT has been adopted in 1996. He averred:

> What has been continued so far is that we adopted CLT many years ago but we were giving importance to only reading and writing skills and we completely avoided listening and speaking skills in classroom teaching. I don't know why but somehow these two skills were not present in our English education system until recent times.

Shamima, also an urban teacher, expressed that without the inclusion of oral practices in a classroom, a true CLT environment could not be created. However, she is now satisfied that all four skills of the English language are now functioning in classrooms. She stated:

> After the inclusion of oral skills in our secondary English teaching in 2015, a true English environment is created in the classroom for English education. Besides, the CLT approach is being implemented in a true sense now, I mean, all four skills are now functioning in our class which was only on paper but not in practice…So far CLT approach was present only in policy and textbooks but has not been functional in the classroom since 1998…but from 2015, we have scope to implement CLT completely with its four skills.

Shamima's response differs from those of Hamid and Mahbub regarding the practice of oral skills in schools. Her reflection indicates that she has the willingness to teach the English language through the CLT approach using all four skills of a language. Her words also reflect that the existing scenario is conducive to teach all four skills of CLT to make it functional in secondary classrooms since 2015.

The Curriculum Head also suggested that the monolingual context in Bangladesh is another hindrance to the complete implementation of CLT with four skills. He stated:

> People use Bangla in their day-to-day life. Bangladesh is a monolingual country, and the national language is Bangla. People here use this language in their day-to-day life. As a result, students here get a limited scope to communicate in English outside their classroom

Due to this situation, both teachers and students are not in the habit of communicating in English, even at a minimum level, either in the classroom or outside the classroom. Whereas verbal practice is very important for a CLT-based approach to language learning, both teachers and students get a limited scope to communicate in English outside their classroom; He added that students do not get 100 percent English language input from their English classes as English language teachers are not capable of conducting a whole class in English. He said:

> The communicative practice could be covered in a class at least for the minimum level of our English teachers could interactively conduct the whole class creating

> different relevant situations. If our teachers could do so then the students would be motivated more to develop their oral skills.

In this statement, the Head of the Curriculum emphasises the necessity of an interactive process of education in a classroom. Research (Alam, 2016; Rasheed, 2017) suggests that interactive processes are not only absent in English language education but also entirely missing in other subjects, including science education. Arguably this is a pervasive problem in how teaching is conducted in Bangladesh. Therefore, the challenge to implement CLT in an interactive way is not only to make English language teaching interactive but also to create an overarching teaching approach that will also make the teaching of other subjects interactive. Since the objective of education is learning and teaching is one way of facilitating learning, interactive practices create opportunities for students to be actively involved in learning. However, in Bangladesh, the classroom teaching tends to be one-way traffic and is mainly teacher-centred through chalk-and-talk where students remain inactive and are passive recipients (Ebrahim, 2017, December 26). If interactive practices can be brought into the classroom for the teaching of all subjects, then it may be easier for the oral skills of CLT to be practised interactively. The absence of interactive practices throughout education is possibly a reason why the CLT is assumed by many to be a failed method for English language education. This matter has been further discussed later in this chapter.

The Head of the Curriculum further added that due to the monolingual context, Bangla is the main language for communication. As a result, he suggested, top-level policymakers are also not concerned about the acquisition of proficiency in the English language. He stated:

> Being the national language, *Bangla* is also used for all sorts of central and local government correspondence. Therefore, the policymakers also do not feel the urge to improve their English language for either written or oral purposes.

His comment raises a question about why English has been made a compulsory subject from Grade 1 to the tertiary level. If *Bangla* can meet the needs of all sorts of communication and policy and if people are reluctant to improve their English language, then why is English needed? However, the attitude of policymakers is not necessarily validated. The policymakers are required to face foreign delegates, and often they are sent to English-speaking countries or the United Nations on behalf of their county, or they are sent for professional training in those countries. In this connection, Bangladeshi newspapers often report that public figures struggle with both oral and orthographic communications while

dealing with international officials and having professional training in English-speaking countries (Shumon, 2016). Shumon further stated:

> ৬২ জনের মধ্যে অর্ধেকই ইংরেজি ঠিকমতো বোঝেন না। যাঁরা ইংরেজিই বোঝেন না তাঁরা কিভাবে ইংরেজিতে প্রশিক্ষণ নেবেন! [Out of 62 selected trainees, half of them do not understand English properly. How will these people have training in English if they do not understand the language!].

Shumon's comment signalled that the trainees who went to the training programmes in an English-speaking country lacked the required level of English proficiency to understand the English lectures during the training sessions. The Head of the Curriculum possibly also meant that unless policy people feel the personal urge to develop their English language for communication, they might not have the mindset to drive the policies that will implement effective practices at the ground level. Moreover, it might be argued that policy peoples' positive mindset towards oral competency in English will also motivate people at the ground level to communicate in English. It is noteworthy that participants expressed the sentiment that CLT was incompletely adopted until 2015 because it excluded listening and speaking skills. Although the opportunity for practising oral skills has been indicated and brought into both English textbooks and sometimes into classroom practice, the practice of oral skills and its assessment are still situated in reality as future reforms. Students' internal school exams, SSC or HSC exams are composed only of items that assess reading and writing skills, although the textbooks focus on integrated four skills. For this reason, teachers and students usually do not involve listening and speaking practices and neither teachers nor students are interested in doing so. Saif, who has been an English language teacher at college earlier and now has become an IELTS trainer, illustrated this situation:

> In our education system, we do not test listening skill in secondary and higher secondary public exams. So, our teachers and students think listening is unnecessary and a waste of time as it is not assessed in the exams.

Rumel, another IELTS trainer and one who has been teaching and preparing post-secondary mainstream students for the IELTS examination, also argues that a CLT approach has not completely been followed by secondary or higher secondary levels for learning English, resulting in a paltry performance of students' listening and speaking skills during IELTS preparatory courses. He argues that if a communicative approach is intended, it must have an environment of real interactions and authentic exposure to a language in the classroom and

only listening and speaking practices provide this opportunity. However, he states that students are completely ignorant of oral skills although they are supposed to have a sufficient foundation in these two skills as listening and speaking skills are in the secondary and higher secondary curriculum. In this regard, Rumel stated:

> Except for the students of English-medium schools, mainstream Bangla-medium students are not familiar with the listening and speaking skills of a language due to their English educational system until they attempt the IELTS or its preparatory course. Our Bangla-medium education system, however, follows a communicative approach to SSC and HSC levels in policy and paper…So, without these two skills, the language learning of a student is incomplete. For this reason, the Bangla-medium students do not develop their verbal communication skills after their higher secondary level that we see when they come for the IELTS preparatory course.

Rumel highlights a difference between students from English-medium schools and those from Bangla-medium, indicating an inconsistency in opportunities to learn English. He seemed to suggest that Bangla-medium students lag behind their counterparts as they cannot develop their oral English language skills although they are supposed to do so according to policy. This situation was vividly realised by Rumel when these students came for IELTS preparation. Several other researchers (Ali & Walker, 2014; Hamid & Honan, 2012; Rahman & Pandian, 2018) also argue that the CLT approach is not appropriate for Bangla-medium schools in Bangladesh and it is a failed approach to English language education in the country. They further argued that research findings of English language education from one country are not always applicable to the pedagogy or policy of another country. However, the Curriculum Head and similarly, other researchers (Islam, 2015; Shurovi, 2014) do not agree on the issue. They argue that the CLT approach cannot be termed as a failed method as CLT has not been completely tried and effectively tested in Bangladesh. Hence, they say, the problem is not with the approach but rather with the practice. This issue is further discussed in the following section.

CLT method − failed or improperly used?

I reported in the previous section that one of my key interviewees, the Head of Curriculum of NCTB, stated that by not including listening and speaking skills, the country does not use CLT completely in the classroom and that many teachers consider CLT as a failed method. In this regard, he explained:

> Actually, our total English language teaching-learning process has failed so far. CLT has been introduced as the previous Grammar-Translation Method failed to provide us with expected outcomes. I would like to say CLT is not failed. Rather we have not implemented CLT properly. Secondly, the other reason is that Bangladesh is a monolingual country, and the national language is Bangla.

It is noteworthy that the Head of Curriculum of NCTB makes a distinction between failure and incomplete implementation of CLT. It seems he wished to suggest that the CLT approach still has potential because it has never been tried as a whole. So, he argues, an approach that has not been completely tried and tested in practice cannot be considered failed. In this regard, he referred to the linguistic context of Bangladesh. Being a monolingual country, he suggested, the situation might hinder the development of English usage. Oral use of the English language is absent both in the classroom and in social contexts, whereas the fundamental function of a language is to make communication, and this is also the main goal of the CLT approach.

Whether CLT has failed or not been implemented really makes a difference for the teachers who work on the ground. In other words, it may be questioned how CLT, in a complete sense, can be implemented without preparing the main players who are the teachers. To make a CLT approach a success, it primarily requires oral fluency from the teachers, as well as methodological knowledge of communicative classroom activities so that teachers can create an environment that can push students to develop their oral skills to achieve communicative competence (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a), which is the prime focus in Bangladeshi English education policy. These skills and knowledge could be gained through pre-service and in-service professional training of English teachers. Moreover, it is relevant now to rethink and reconstruct our national CLT approach, as no method is a *one size fits all* and the success of a method depends on adaptation to the specifics of context and culture. So if our monolingual context is not conducive to CLT practice, as argued by the Head of Curriculum of NCTB, then there is either a mismatch between CLT and the grounded reality of Bangladesh or extra resources need to be created to deal with issues of an unfavourable social context, unhelpful classroom environment, and the incapacities of teachers. Now the question arises whether there is a need for a judiciously synthesised approach to English teaching, combining both GT and CLT methods or CLT and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) or another combination of interactive strategies that could be practically practised in the Bangladeshi context.

Blame game

The *blame game*, common in various sectors of society, can restrict productivity and promote hard feelings among people (Fast, 2010). In the context of Bangladesh, a blame game was evident when both the macro and micro level stakeholders of education expressed their differing opinions regarding the implementation of CLT for English language education. The blame game is evidenced at the macro-level when the Head of Curriculum of NCTB blamed the lack of oral practices for successful CLT implementation on the incapability of teachers:

> Besides, the students also do not get 100 percent English language input from their English classes as our English teachers are not capable enough to conduct a whole 40/50- minute-class in English. The communicative practice could be covered in a class at least for the minimum level until our English teachers could interactively conduct the whole class creating the different relevant situations.

At the same time, NCTB curriculum developer, Rahim, also placed the blame on the teachers for the reason why CLT was not implemented properly at the ground level:

> There are many obstacles. Number one is teachers' lack of language proficiency, number two is their lack of commitment, and number three is their wrong perception of CLT pedagogy and the need for change in their perception. They have to be creative in conducting classroom practices for oral skills…Another very big obstacle is the student-teacher ratio as we have a very big class size.

Among all these obstacles, Rahim most strongly accentuated the factor of teachers' mental attitudes. He stated:

> Teachers are products of the Grammar-Translation Method. They don't have any experience to accept or undergo this new perception of teaching listening and speaking skills in the classroom. I often talk to the English teachers; they tell me that as we teachers have learned English only by reading and writing skills then why to bother about teaching listening and speaking skill. Another thing is that the teachers don't have an understanding of the CLT approach to learn a language.

The argument of the Head of Curriculum of NCTB seems to indicate that teachers of the English language are the only barrier to the proper and successful implementation of CLT in English language teaching in Bangladesh. At the same time, Rahim's words also imply that there is no problem with the macro-level and all the problems in making CLT successful are

related to the micro-level. At the same time, the blame game is also evidenced at the micro-level. Many teachers from both urban and rural contexts have stated that they have not been trained properly to apply a CLT approach to a classroom, that classes are oversized, that class duration is insufficient, and that they have an overload of classes due to the scarcity of English language teachers, and those paltry physical facilities of the classroom do not allow them to practice communicative activities with students. Yunus, one of the rural teachers, stated:

> Although I have not received any training to teach English through the CLT method, I try by myself following the instructions in the textbooks and guidebooks.

Similarly, Hamid and Erling (2016) argued that policymakers in Bangladesh never considered the resources and personnel capacities at the micro-level while adopting CLT. This disregard, they found, resulted in the CLT approach being dysfunctional as many schools have resource restrictions and there is a gap between teachers' required pedagogical skills and their existing pedagogical skills. Therefore, because of a lack of consideration of micro-level capabilities and resources, top-down policies for English education are ineffective. Similarly, Islam (2015) reported that donor-funded projects were prevalent for the improvement of teachers' training. However, these donor-funded projects for teacher training do not sufficiently examine the resources available for implementation while offering methodological instruction.

Moreover, several research studies highlighted the donor-funded projects as a waste of resources and time, such as the English Language Teaching Improvement project (ELTIP) and English in Action (EIA). These two projects had similar goals but they were disconnected in terms of using training infrastructure and usage of training resource personnel due to a lack of coordination between them (Al Amin, 2017; Hamid & Erling, 2016). As far as the blame on teachers is concerned, my personal experience affirms the findings of Rahman et al. (2018) that most English teachers at the secondary level started teaching English without any pre-service professional training but were blamed for the inability to teach English through the CLT approach. This culture of blaming teachers for failing to implement education policies is not only prevalent in Bangladesh (Hasnat, 2017) but also in other countries in Asia and Africa, such as Senegal, Uganda, and Indonesia. Indeed, a recent UNESCO report (Edwards, 2017) concludes that in many cases, policies

made at the macro-level fail at the micro-level due to management and implementation issues rather than because of the role played by teachers.

What seems appropriate to argue here is that a process of involving teachers in policy-making can contribute to reducing the gap between micro and macro- implementation process and that the blame game needs to give way to both policy people and teachers listening to each other and developing communication between both parties.

CLT and its adaptation

I interviewed a number of secondary teachers who received training on the CLT approach to English language education. They reported their understanding of the training and commented on the actual classroom situation in which they are expected to implement their achieved knowledge of training for the CLT. Their statements below identify their opinions about the gap between the training for the CLT and the actual classroom situation:

> Shahnaz: The training that was given to us demonstrated CLT activities for a class size of 40 students, but we have not been trained to practice CLT where the class size is 80 to 100 students, and the class duration is less than an hour (an urban English teacher).

> Shamima: We are given training on CLT pedagogy to teach in a class where the ratio of teachers and students will be a maximum of 1:40. But in reality, we have to deal with a large class size with a number of students 80-100 on average. So, we are unable to implement our trained knowledge on CLT in the classroom (an urban English teacher).

It is noteworthy that both Shahnaz and Shamima received training on CLT as it was prescribed by the donor agencies, such as the British Council or IDB, who worked in collaboration with the Bangladesh government. Therefore, a methodological practice that had been developed based on the context of donor agencies was often replicated in the Bangladeshi context without apparent adaptation to local conditions or checking the feasibility on the ground if CLT needed any adaptation to the context. As a result, the problem that Shahnaz faced was that she received training to make CLT functional in a class of around 40 students, but in reality, she had to use CLT for teaching English to a class where the students, on average, numbered 80 to 100 and the class duration was limited. Her

response suggests that either the training is a total waste of time in this context or the training has to be adapted to match the dynamics of a class of 80 to100 students in a single classroom.

Therefore, Shahnaz further highlights that the problem seems not to be with the method but with the context in which it is implemented. This presents a challenge to customise CLT for the Bangladeshi context. The research by Williams (2017) in a similar East Asian classroom context also recommended a reduction of class size in secondary schools as there are currently overcrowded and cramped classroom spaces for the teachers to conduct communicative activities. He further argued that East Asian learners naturally used to develop their self-learning styles for English competence and these did not match the West-centric CLT approach. This argument further highlights the need to develop a form of CLT training that is adaptable to the local context. This type of training would improve teachers' skills in how to conduct such activities by themselves in addition to training them on how to teach their students to learn from communicative activities.

Several other participants of this study from both policy and practice levels also discussed the necessity for the adaptation of CLT in the Bangladeshi context to make it a success or more functional. Hamid (English-subject adviser of NCTB) acknowledged that the policy for adopting CLT for English education is needed for Bangladesh, but the problem is with the implementation level. That is why he thought it took almost 20 years since its inception to implement CLT completely (with listening and speaking skills) in the English textbooks and classroom practice. Although he perceived the problems to be the teachers' traditional perception, lack of proper training on CLT and teachers' lack of dedication to implementing CLT in a classroom are obstacles, and he identified large-classroom size as the main barrier to the proper implementation of CLT in Bangladesh. He stated:

> But the problem is… you see. The policy level was all right. But the problem lies with the implementation level; that is why it took another 20 years to adopt CLT completely in the English textbooks by NCTB. Major problems for this are for large-classroom size, teachers are not dedicated, teachers are not well trained, and they lack dedication. For these reasons, it is very difficult to put CLT into the function. But I think the main problem with not properly implementing CLT, is the large classroom size.

The causes related to the delayed process of CLT adaptation in Bangladesh that Hamid cited, generate a vital query about teachers' lack of dedication. This is often an accusation by policy-related people. Al Amin (2017) and Alam (2016) in their research have found that

there were teachers with a lack of training or pedagogical knowledge for English language teaching. Many teachers are not familiar with the CLT approach and some hold on to their traditional grammar-based teaching approaches. However, their research also affirmed the dedication of some teachers, despite several contextual and institutional constraints. As an exception, they also found, that some teachers are not dedicated to their teaching job at school due to their private tutoring. This practice of private tutoring often makes teachers tired of the class session and demotivates them to engage in learning and professional improvement (Hasnat, 2017). Other research (Rahman et al, 2018) found that the issue was not related to teachers' dedication but rather they lacked sufficient pre-service as well as in-service training coupled with insufficient learning resources. So, Hamid's attribution of the dysfunction of CLT caused by teachers' lack of dedication invites further questions.

Hamid's criticism about the classroom size as a barrier to effective implementation of CLT also raises questions. It is the responsibility of Hamid and his associates to adapt CLT to fit in with class size. A policymaker should know the overly large class sizes in schools in Bangladesh. Policymakers could either increase the number of classrooms in schools or decrease the number of students in each class to match what is advocated (1:25 or 1:30) by the CLT methodology (Harmer, 2015; Tarannum, 2010). So, it cannot be said that a policy is a good one if it does not fit in the classroom context.

Despite these problems related to the implementation of a complete CLT approach, Mahbub, an urban teacher, also thought that CLT has not failed in Bangladesh, as it is not effectively used. Further, he argued that CLT could be an effective approach to teach the English language to secondary students. In the interview, he shared an effective story of an effective CLT approach that he witnessed in his school. He described how an American language trainer, as a part of voluntary service, supported his secondary students in English learning. The American language trainer created communicative situations and so motivated the students to interact with one another:

> I observed the way he motivated students to make the class interactive. He used to write familiar words on the board for the students such as "turtle" or 'bird". Then he used to ask the students to describe the similarities and dissimilarities of these two creatures in English. In the beginning, the students had discomfort in speaking, but they soon overcame this discomfort by themselves and tried to speak spontaneously. After a couple of days, I saw that the technique was effective and all the students came up to

> say something in English. Actually, what I understood is that we must create a congenial space for the students to interact in the class for English learning.

Taher, who is a rural English teacher, also thought that if a CLT approach to English education is properly implemented it could create better learning opportunities for the students and enable them to discard their fear of English.

> The thing that has been changing in rural areas is the fear of English. Even a few years ago, students used to learn English with fear, but now they do not fear English. As the classrooms have been equipped with multimedia facilities, it is now easier than before to make the classroom interactive and increase the attention of the students to English learning, breaking their fear to interact in the classroom.

Participants prioritise diverse problems affecting the implementation of CLT. As discussed earlier in this section, some participants in this study, from policy and practice levels of English language education, state that the CLT approach is neither a failure nor properly implemented in Bangladesh. So, it remains important to implement the CLT approach effectively in Bangladesh to make it a successful means for English education. Hamid affirmed that the ongoing National Curriculum English 2012 maintains a CLT approach with, however, some contextual modifications. He stated:

> The concept of CLT has not been taken away. It is there. But we are trying to find a way for our own context.

Hamid's assertion highlights the ongoing tension that is occurring in Bangladesh where a methodology for English language education has been promoted twenty years ago but appears to be failed abysmally in many schools in practice, especially in rural areas, but has not been rejected as a concept. Other researchers (such as Rahman et al., 2018) have described the factors which cause the failure of CLT so far in Bangladesh, such as lack of teachers' orientation to the CLT curriculum, insufficient training for their professional development, lack of clarity in the curriculum of how to connect theory to practice, and disconnects between curriculum materials and assessment tools. So, it is evident that there is a significant gap between the general concept of CLT and the CLT package that is being used in Bangladesh. The problematic question here is whether it is time to move away from CLT

to other recently developed approaches, such as *post-method pedagogy*[15] or *principled eclecticism*[16], or to customise the principles embedded in CLT to fit in the Bangladeshi context. Hamid further reported that the CLT approach had been adopted in Bangladesh without preparing the ground with relevant changes in infrastructural and logistic supports together with necessary teacher training. He acknowledged:

> In a sense, it is true. The ground was not prepared and there was not enough survey or research on how to implement CLT for English teaching and learning. The people of the policy level or decision-makers have not prepared well-trained CLT teachers to make it fully functional in a classroom. Even they have not prepared the trainers or teacher educators to train the English teachers. For this reason, we are still struggling.

Various analyses (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Rahman, 2010; Walker & Ali, 2014) of this situation have led researchers and academics to term CLT a failed replacement of the former Grammar-Translation Method that was also considered a failed method for achieving English language competency. It is relevant here to suggest that any single-faceted approach to English language education can fail, as discussed later in this section. For this reason, Hamid, NCTB subject expert, and Shamima, urban English teacher, argued that CLT should be culturally and contextually customised to fit the Bangladeshi context. Both Hamid and Shamima criticised the exact replication of the ideas from BANA countries to Bangladesh. Hamid averred:

> There is a realisation by the language experts, particularly started with Adrian Holliday's appropriate methodology in the social context. He pointed out first that ideas generated from the western countries or BANA countries that means the UK, USA, etc. and if you want to implement those ideas in a non-BANA country, then it will be unsuccessful. It will be like a foreign implant…a kind of tissue rejection.

Shamima further stated about the training program funded by the donor agency:

> There are two to three donor-funded projects going on in English education nationwide, such as the English in Action (EIA) project. I think the training-

[15] Postmethod pedagogy is a theoretical concept of teaching English which was first coined by Kumaravadivelu in 1994 to free English teaching from the method-based restrictions for a most optimal way of teaching the language.
[16] The methodological concept that fits the method to the learner, not the learner to the method.

> knowledge for the CLT approach by the donor-funded projects does not fit into our classroom context.

However, Hamid also noted that Bangladesh had started to think about contextualizing any method to fit in the country's needs and capabilities. He stated:

> So, we can't be absolutely rigid to any specific methodology. Within the situation, within the country, according to the ability of the teachers, according to the receptive abilities of the learners, we have to devise our own methodology and techniques. We are trying to find a way that will be more appropriate and more suitable for our English classrooms. I think it is happening gradually in Bangladesh.

Hamid here emphasises that a more appropriate method is required for English classrooms in the Bangladeshi context. He does not specify any method, but his further comments emphasise the need to fit CLT into the Bangladeshi context. He referred to leading international researchers who promoted the notion of contextual customisation of any methodology for language education. He stated:

> You will find different kinds of literature on CLT... Holliday told us that we had to contextualize the method CLT to our needs. Recently, people like Kumaravadivelu have been writing about post-method pedagogy. He was talking about cultural appropriateness, contextual sensitivities, and things like that.

The participants in this study report that the CLT approach to English language education in Bangladesh is not functioning, as it is not properly implemented. However, some of the participants emphasise the need to make CLT culturally and contextually appropriate to Bangladesh. This was also emphasised by Bangladesh-based research. In particular, Al Amin (2017) and Rasheed (2017) argued that English competency had become one of the major requirements as a tool of economic development for the people of Bangladesh to be successful locally as well as globally. So, the Bangladesh government has taken relevant initiatives in its current education policy to develop all four skills of English by the introduction of a CLT-based English curriculum and textbooks at secondary and higher secondary levels. However, both of them criticised the methodological prescriptions of donor projects, mostly related to the British Council and British institutions, for English education in Bangladesh without considering the way of learning and culture.

International research is also available on this urge for the contextual customisation of the communicative approach to English language education (Canagarajah, 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and to understand the classroom dynamic in relation to the social structures of a particular context where the mainstream or BANA countries' pedagogical contexts do not fit in other non-BANA contexts for their local needs, such as in Sri Lanka and India. In a Western Asian country, Koosha and Yakhabi (2013) also found local socio-cultural context as a barrier to implement BANA countries' CLT approach to English education in the EFL context.

Confusion in the academic debate on CLT in Bangladesh

> Yeah, a communicative approach to English teaching is very important to develop all four skills of the English language for the students.
>
> (Shahnaz, an urban secondary teacher)

In this statement, Shahnaz emphasises how important the communicative approach is to teach all four skills of using the English language. Although I have quoted one statement regarding the importance of a communicative approach to English language teaching, other teachers in the study expressed similar views. Nonetheless, the issue of CLT English language education is still confusing for the academic discourse in Bangladesh. Two participants discussed how an improper implementation of CLT generated methodical confusion. The statements of Nurul and Anam, both urban teachers, signposted one of the key reasons for the confusion about CLT: it is assumed by many teachers that teaching grammar is absent from the methods and correctness of grammar is unimportant.

> Nurul (urban teacher): In the CLT approach, teaching and learning of English grammar are also changed. Here grammar is not explicit but implicit. So, like the traditional way, the CLT approach does not teach grammar by rules and translation but in an "applied" way through the context and content of the sentences.

> Anam (urban teacher): Students always focus on the use of grammatical correctness of the language. They do not think that fluency or communicative skill in English is important.

From the words of Nurul and Anam, it is evident that learning the correct use of grammar is still considered by many teachers as the primary focus of English learning; whereas, the foremost attention of the current curriculum is to develop communicative competence in English. Nurul's use of the term "applied way" is significant as it indicates that CLT always emphasises the meaningful use of language over accuracy in the usage of language. His use of the term "traditional way" refers to the GTM, in which it is believed that explicit knowledge of grammar is used to help learners to produce correct sentences and that these are more important than making contextually correct and meaningful communications. A fallacious perception has also developed in Bangladeshi academia that the correctness of English is not a matter of concern in the CLT approach as the approach prioritises fluency leading to accuracy (Karim, Mohamed, Rahman, & Haque, 2017). However, it is also possible to teach grammatical rules through communicative repertoire rather than in isolation, and language learning is more effective when it involves real communicative acts (Brown & Lee, 2015). Another Bangladeshi researcher Ahmed (2013), also argued that the principles of CLT never suggested ignoring grammar. Rather CLT suggests different methods of practising grammar, turning from a deductive to an inductive way of teaching grammatical rules. In terms of teaching grammar, CLT vividly varies from the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) which led students to feel bored and burdened in the discussion of grammatical rules of the English language. Nurul emphasised:

> Teaching and learning grammar for the English language could be more effective as it is contextualised in the CLT approach through practice.

Therefore, criticisms, such as those put forward by Alam (2018), that grammar is ignored in a CLT approach and consequently, this approach does not improve the teaching and learning of the English language are problematic. Moreover, Hamid reported that "due to the absence of the oral skills in secondary public examinations (and currently there is no item in the question paper of those exams that requires communicative ability) it is difficult to leverage CLT for English teaching and learning and to eradicate the confusions about it." Islam (2015) also argued that public exams without the assessment of listening and speaking skills trigger serious criticism among academia about the value of CLT. Oral skills are not only the core elements of CLT but also communicative competence, and communicative competence in English is a policy goal of Bangladesh.

Hamid, the English-subject adviser of NCTB, also criticised the stance taken by Alam (2018) and added a further comment about misconceptions about the CLT approach that were creating confusion among the secondary teachers of English. He said:

> Yeah, there are some misconceptions about CLT in our country. First of all, the teachers are the products of the Grammar-Translation Method. So, they are reluctant to accept a new method of language teaching. Secondly, it is their misconception about CLT that it does not have grammar. There is also the school of thought that English literature is the best means of teaching and learning English, but this is not a correct idea or theory-grounded idea. For these reasons, it is struggling to teach English through CLT. There are challenges like that. Teachers don't understand what CLT is and what the CLT approach means to language teaching.

Hamid's comment indicates a need to change teachers' traditional mindset and embrace new methods of teaching English, such as CLT. To address this problem, Hamid has suggested in-service pedagogical training for all the teachers. Hamid's comment also aligns with the findings of Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2017) in Egypt where teachers were also reluctant to embrace the CLT as a new method of teaching English as a considerable amount of time was required to prepare communicative materials and they had to achieve a high level of proficiency in spoken English. Hamid's reference to the school of thought that advocates literature-based teaching and learning of English identifies a dilemma for curriculum policy, classroom practice, and assessment. His comment highlights that there are two schools of thought in terms of methodological priority for teaching and learning the English language. The tension between these two schools of thought affects the country's English curriculum policy and the textbooks for English education. It is relevant here to comment that a consequence of this methodological disagreement is the current textbook *English for Today* (Classes 11-12) (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012b), which follows neither CLT nor GTM effectively but is rather an effort to compromise between the two approaches. Rahim, a content and material developer of NCTB, stated:

> This actually happened due to the Chief Editor and her team for the textbook of Grades 11-12. I coordinated the revision of the textbook on behalf of NCTB. All of them were professors of English literature and the product of the Grammar-Translation Method. Their logic is that language can be learned from the literature and literary texts can be used for language learning exercises in a textbook. So, due to their influence, this

> textbook contains more focus on literature than the main focus on language for communicative function. We have also noticed that.

The comments of both Rahim and Hamid highlight the ongoing tension, which is hotly debated about the best methodology for English language education in Bangladesh. Rahim's comment about the influence of the textbook editor and her team suggests a bias on the part of the editorial team because of their preconceived notion of literature-based language learning through the Grammar-Translation approach. The suggestion is made that those who are products of the Grammar-Translation Method advocate a more traditional approach through literature rather than a practice-based approach through every day and situational English for communication. Hamid also stated:

> Some people think that, for example, I cannot mention names… I won't mention his name. Recently, he has written a newspaper article saying that CLT is a complete failure in Bangladesh. He mentioned that we had learned English through the Grammar-Translation Method, and we have learned good English at that time. Now the students are weak in English, and they don't have a basic grammar sense of English. So, bring back the Grammar-Translation Method again. We are facing this problem.

Therefore, the statements of Rahim and Hamid accentuate the visible dissent between those who want to bring back the old Grammar-Translation Method and those who want to make the communicative approach more functional. However, regardless of whether the Grammar-Translation Method or CLT is better for learning the English language, the problem remains of students' weakness in English and their performance in public exams (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Chowdhury, 2017). This raises the question of whether it is only the methods that are responsible for the students' weakness or whether the cause is a disconnection between policy, practice, and assessment at the secondary level of English education. This issue is further discussed later in this chapter.

Alignment with the international debate on the use of English literature in CLT

The integration of English literature in language education curriculum and textbooks is not only a debatable issue in Bangladesh but also highly discussed in other non-native contexts of English education. In India, Choudhary (2016) found that teachers started using literary texts for language teaching so that students could not only get interested in language learning but also explore and ignite critical and creative skills in themselves. However, many teachers

found it difficult, as Indian classrooms were multicultural, with students' bringing different cultural interpretations to the literary texts used in teaching.

In Singapore's schools, although English language and English literature are offered as two separate subjects, some teachers started including literary texts in their English language teaching so that students could learn the variety of expressions available in English and so be enabled to use it effectively in the global world (McConnell, 2014). The English Language syllabus 2010 of Singapore emphasised the development of skills of oracy of the English language but also recommended an integrated, authentic, and holistic approach that created space for literature in the language classroom (McConnell, 2014).

In Malaysia, the inclusion of English literature was not given much importance until English was taught as a second language in Malaysian schools, and then literature materials were used creatively to teach English. Moreover, Malaysia started following the Language-based Approach (LBA), which would incorporate activities based on literary texts and graded according to students' proficiency levels (Dhillon & Mogan, 2017). Tevdovska (2016) found that in the context of southeast Europe the use of literary text for teaching and learning second or foreign languages was a focal point of the debate. She reported that some teachers and learners found literary texts useful and motivating for language learning, whereas others found the literary texts too complex, archaic, and time-consuming as means to learn syntax and vocabulary required for everyday messages. The participants who found literary texts useful and motivating preferred short stories to poems.

It is claimed (Choudhary, 2016; Violetta-Irene, 2015) that although the study of literature is not generally deemed a coherent branch of the curriculum and study of a language, both literature and language education focus primarily on the elements of language and literature can play the role of an ally of language learning by making a class interactive. Therefore, some teachers and researchers advocate an integration of language and literature to develop learners' both critical and communicative skills. Lazer (1993) earlier said, "Literary texts enrich the language input in a classroom and stimulate acquisition by providing meaningful and memorable contexts for processing and interpreting the new language" (p.17).

Therefore, the debate about whether to integrate literature and how to select it to exist not only in Bangladesh but also in other non-native contexts for English education. So do debate about how to maximize linguistic knowledge of learners through literature, and how to use

literary texts for a communicative focus and to help students acquire language for both personal interpretation of their everyday experiences and as a means of communication.

Views about oral skills in Bangladesh

Misconceptions about oral skills for language learning prevail at both policy and practice levels. The following statements by the participants, policy-makers, and practising teachers, depicted a range of opinions on oral skills.

> The Head of NCTB: The policy-level people in our country do not think that all four skills of a language should be developed equally. But they think that the oral skills of the Bangla language can be developed naturally by the students and we need not teach the oral skills.

> Goutum (curriculum-material developer of NCTB): Actually, many factors have been working behind this issue for not implementing listening and speaking skills. One factor is the teachers' mental perception. Teachers are products of the Grammar-Translation Method. They don't have any mental preparation to accept or undergo this new perception of teaching listening and speaking skills in a classroom. I often talk to the English teachers, and they have told me that "as we teachers have learned English only by reading and writing skills then why bother about teaching listening and speaking skill!"

> Hamid (English-subject adviser of NCTB): The general perception of our experts and English teachers is that both listening and speaking skills automatically develop once they start interacting in English with one another or in an English context. So, students only need to learn reading and writing for their learning of English.

> Anam (urban English teacher): Many teachers think that they know writing and reading English well, which is enough to teach and learn English, they do not need listening or speaking skills…They do not feel the urge to use English communicatively in the classroom. So, they also do not encourage students to improve their oral skills in the English language.

The statements of the Head of the Curriculum and Hamid suggest that misconceptions about the importance of developing oral skills in the English language result from understandings

how the *Bangla* language is learned. The common perception of the people in policymaking in Bangladesh is that oral skills can be developed automatically and without systematic learning. However, oracy and orthography are two different systems of language although connected, and oral skills normally precede orthographic skills (Rost, 2016; Saville-Troike, 2012). For this reason, oral skills are considered primary skills. Without the development of oral skills, it is really difficult to develop orthographic skills which are considered secondary skills of any language (Rasheed, 2011). Moreover, oral skills also need to be taught and learned just as do orthographic skills. Lack of understanding by people at the policy level of the need to actively develop oral skills is maybe one of the reasons for not having oral skills in secondary English textbooks (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a) and classroom teaching until the year 2015, whereas all four skills including oral skills for English education had been adopted in policy in 1996. Gautam's comment reports his perception of teachers' traditional mindsets and their misconceptions of oral skills. His comment suggests the unwillingness of teachers to accept changes in English teaching using oral skills as the teachers themselves learned English without developing oral skills. So, many teachers perceive that in the same way, students could also learn English without the oral skills of the English language. Relevant research reported that many of the secondary English teachers, being products of a GTM, lacked proficiency in the listening and speaking skills of the English language (Islam, 2015; Rahman et al., 2018). These were the reasons for their unwillingness to practise oral skills in the classroom and to motivate students to develop oral skills. However, Nurul's statement, coming from a classroom practitioner, contradicts the opinions of the policy people. He stated:

> On the part of the students, they have a problem with their mindset, which creates an obstacle to practice listening and speaking in a classroom. They think that they will not learn English through the practice of listening. They only think that if they learn writing, they will learn English. Actually, they still do not realise the global necessity of oral proficiency in the English language.

Nurul's statement argues that it is students' mindset that is not conducive to the practice of oracy in the classroom. This student's mindset may have developed because of the exclusion of oral skills in the examination process, which will be discussed further. Students' lack of interest may demotivate teachers to practice oral skills in the classroom, rather than vice-versa. Nurul's comment signals another reason for students' reluctance to practise oral skills. The reasons for the reluctance are that oral skills in English do not appear as a need in a

monolingual society and students do not realise the global necessity of developing oral skills in the English language. It is noteworthy to mention here that oral skills are not practised or prioritised in all schools parallel to reading and writing activities. Yunus, a rural teacher, identified another type of misconception regarding the knowledge of knowing English without the consideration of oral proficiency. He stated:

> In our country, the concept is that if a person knows grammar well, he knows English well. However, knowing English actually indicates how to communicate in English in practical life. In our school, many students know English grammar well but when they are asked to speak at least five sentences in English to describe something, they could neither utter the sentences correctly nor fluently. So, you can learn language rules from learning grammar, but without listening and speaking practice, you cannot improve your language proficiency.

Yunus's statement informs that knowing good English grammar is an age-old concept regarding the knowledge of the English language for a person in the Bangladeshi context. His indication reflects that although the communicative approach to English teaching has been adopted, the perception based on the traditional grammar-dependent teaching approach is still prevalent. Students still focus more on grammatical form than on the communicative aspect of the language, resulting in them being neither correct nor fluent speakers of the language. His further comment about using "language rules" suggests that by learning language rules in isolation without practising in interaction, one cannot improve language proficiency, which is the core requirement of a language. His statement also indicated that the grammatical rules of a language could be improved through communicative practice.

Views about listening proficiency in Bangladesh

The previous section reported participants' statements about misconceptions about oral skills. This section reports participants' more specific discussion of misconceptions about listening proficiency. Two participants from both policy and practice levels respectively commented on misconceptions related to listening proficiency:

> Nurul: …Students think: "what is the use of English listening? It is not graded in the exam". So, to motivate students for listening proficiency and to improve English learning, it should be included in public exams.

> Goutum: Ideally, listening skill should be learned first. For example, in our mother

> tongue, we first listen to learn the language, and gradually listening moves us to speak, and gradually, the time comes when we start learning reading, and finally, we start learning writing. However, in our country, there is a misconception, and the process does not follow the way; rather, it begins with reading. So, in our country listening skill is not considered an important language skill for language input which should be considered first for better competency in English. So, it is still very neglected.

Nurul's statement suggests that the teaching of the English language is very much exam-driven. He further claims that students would only be motivated if listening skill is graded in the exams. On the other hand, Goutum's statement reflects that in English language classes, the acquisition of oral skills does not precede orthographic skills. His comment also highlights that instead of benefitting from two channels of language input for learning, students only get language input from reading materials. In this regard, Hamid stated:

> But only reading input is not enough to learn a language. A learner needs authentic and interactive exposure to that target language. That is why language learning lessons should start with listening input. However, it is a neglected skill in our country.

Hamid's comment accentuates the importance of listening proficiency as an input channel for the learners as they need to understand the speaker first to participate in the communication. In this regard, Vandergrift and Goh (2012) reported that adults use most of their communication in verbal form and to conduct a meaningful conversations. So, we have to understand the speaker first, and then reply accordingly. Moreover, like the other three language skills, listening skill is also an active and independent skill for language learning that can also be taught systematically (Brown & Lee, 2015). While it is often asserted (Brown & Lee, 2015; Renukadevi, 2014; Rost, 2016; Saville-Troike, 2012) that listening skill is an independent skill that is used first as the basis for all four skills for the learning of any language, that concept is missing in the Bangladeshi context. It is relevant to comment here that in terms of the degree of emphasis given, listening skill seemed to be considered the least important skill for English language learning in Bangladesh.

Disconnections between policy, classroom practice, and assessment

The National Curriculum for English (2012) emphasises the importance of teaching and testing all four skills of English. National Education Policy 2010 also evaluates English as a tool to create a knowledge-based society. The policy proposes the English language as a compulsory subject in all schools, colleges, and universities to develop the communicative skills of all students. However, only reading and writing are being taught and tested. As speaking and listening are being ignored in tests, these are also parked aside in classroom teaching often. A range of opinions of the participants regarding the disconnects are as follows:

> A policymaker: There is a Bangla proverb that "একবারে না পারিলে দেখো শতবার" (if you fail to do in your first attempt, try it again for hundred times). So, until now, we have failed to implement oral skills in the classroom, but we are trying.
>
> A secondary teacher: As a result of the inclusion of oral skills since 2013 in our secondary English textbook, our classroom environment may become communicative in the true sense. Although the CLT approach was followed by the textbooks since 1997, according to the English curriculum, it was not there for practice until 2013.
>
> An IELTS trainer: The Bangla-medium students of our education system are not familiar with the test for oral skills. Although our Bangla-medium education system follows a communicative approach to SSC and HSC levels and listening and speaking skills are supposed to be assessed, it just remains in policy and paper.

The above-mentioned Bangla proverb used by one of the policymakers and the statements of two participants reported that oral skills have faced an inconsistent progression in Bangladesh since their advent and inclusion in the curriculum. Following the issues discussed in earlier sections, this section examines the disconnections of policy about oral skills, classroom practice, and assessment. These disconnections led the National Curriculum & Textbook Board to revise its secondary curriculum in 2012 for English language education in light of the National Education Policy 2010. The only textbook for the whole country at the secondary level, *English for Today* has been developed accordingly in 2013 for Grades 6 to 10, to help students attain competency in listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, participants from both policy and practice levels reported that there is a disconnection

between curriculum, classroom practice, and assessment. There are multiple reasons for this disconnection. Appendices I and J show both the proposed sample question paper given in the textbook and the actual question paper for the subject of English for the SSC examination. This highlights the gap between the proposed question paper and the question paper which appeared in the SSC examination. Goutum, a curriculum designer and developer, reported:

> There are three pillars of Education. Number one is curriculum, number two is the assessment and number three is teacher education. The quality of any education stands on these three pillars. When we make our curriculum, we incorporate all the good thoughts as all the religious books write about good things. But you know, to write something on paper is one thing and to implement it is another thing. As far as Bangladesh is concerned, NCTB (National Curriculum & Textbook Board) develops, revises, and recommends the curriculum but NCTB is not liable to implement the curriculum and to conduct the examinations. Ministry of Education implements the curriculum and the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education conduct public examinations. Somehow, a huge incoherence impedes curriculum implementation.

Goutum's statement indicates that curriculum adaptation, curriculum implementation, and curriculum assessment process are incoherent. His analogy of religious books to our curriculum indicates that there is no problem with the curriculum and as a curriculum, it is ideal to follow. Nonetheless, the incoherence was acknowledged by Goutum as three different bodies were responsible for three different tasks of the curriculum − NCTB for the curriculum design and adaptation, the Ministry of Education for the implementation process, and the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education for the assessment process of the curriculum − and all the three bodies lack cohesion within their function. Therefore, it is problematic to put the policy of oral skills into classroom practice and assessment process so far. Hamid further added:

> Yes, it is not in the testing process. However, we have a plan to put it in the testing. It is a huge task. Teachers first have to know how to teach and administer a listening or speaking test. The test has to be some specific criteria for grading that teachers should be known. Even for speaking skills, how to test, how to evaluate them, and how to grade them. So, these things should be overcome first, by training and familiarizing with the testing- equipment over a long period before listening and speaking are to be tested for English exams.

Hamid's comment has aligned with that of Goutum, as he explained that it is always easy to write and incorporate ideal targets in the educational curriculum, but it is always hard at the edge of implementation. Hamid's words indicate that the ground was not ready in 1997 when oral skills were proposed to be incorporated in classrooms as a part of all four skills of English language teaching and learning. He also indicates that oral skills could be adopted later in the curriculum once the ground is supportive in terms of teachers' capacity to teach and practise oral skills properly. At the same time, teachers need to have long-term training to know how to administer, evaluate and grade a test on listening and speaking skills. Hamid's comment suggests that there was a lack of contextual understanding while incorporating oral skills into the secondary English language curriculum. The ground was not prepared and there was no survey research on how to implement oral skills. His comment also signals that the people at the policy level or decision-makers have not prepared well-trained teachers on how to practise and assess oral skills to make the process fully functional in a classroom. They have not even prepared teacher educators to train the English language teachers. On the other hand, the English teachers who participated in the study reported different reasons why oral skills did not function at classroom practice and assessment levels. Shahnaz, an assistant teacher from an urban school, reported:

> Although in our syllabus and textbook, listening and speaking are included and should be assessed in internal exams of the school, we are not able to do that…neither students nor the school authority is interested in it. These are not mandatory for teaching in the classroom, as these are not assessed in public exams. However, 10 marks for listening and 10 marks for speaking have been allotted to assess these skills in the internal exams but the relevant internal exam committee grades these 20 marks in proportion to the written performance of the students as we the teachers are not allowed to assess these skills internally yet (*showing a facial depression*).

Shahnaz's face expressed disappointment as she made these comments. Her words reinforce the way the education system is exam-driven. Her comments further indicate that it is not important to either the school authority or the students that oral skills are in the syllabus and textbooks if they are not in the assessment process. She also showed disappointment with the internal examination committees for producing a grading of oral skills based not on students' oral proficiency but as a pro-rata with written performance. This has two implications. Firstly, it supports the finding that the importance of oral skills is not understood. Secondly, her comment has re-ignited the ongoing debate in Bangladeshi academia (Musa, 2017) that

the exam-driven education system has transformed the students from learners to mere examinees as the students are not keen to learn but only to pass the exam. They intend to learn only what is tested in an examination. Earlier, Podder (2011) found that students were not interested in practising oral skills as the practice would not bring them any direct benefits in terms of marks and grading. Yunus, a rural teacher, also spoke about the procedures for grading oral skills:

> No, we do not teach oral skills and we also do not assess these skills in our school. We assign grades based on students' written performance only.

Ismail, a rural English teacher, reported some other issues that prevent him from practising oral skills in his classroom. He stated:

> No, personally I do not know whether our teachers are instructed to conduct a school-based assessment of listening and speaking skills. Listening and speaking are treated as out of the syllabus. So, with the pressure of completing the syllabus, we cannot practise listening and speaking.

Yunus clearly indicates a discrepancy between policy and practices around placing equal importance on teaching across written and oral skills of the English language. His words further indicate that the discrepancy seems to cause the absence of assessing students' oral skills in the examination as the teachers assess students' English language competence by their written performance only. Ismail, however, puts the issue differently. He seems to criticise the policymakers in this regard. His comment reflects that teachers are not well-informed about the policy of teaching, practising and assessing oral skills. His comment also highlights the disconnection between policy and practice: how can oral skills be included in the curriculum if they are considered to be out of the syllabus? His comment also raises another question regarding the validity of the current syllabus for secondary English education as he reported that he could not practice oral skills due to the pressure of completing the syllabus. However, oral skills are an integral part of the syllabus and textbook. Despite the disconnects, Goutum, one of the two key persons who writes, edits and develops syllabus and materials for Secondary English textbooks, and Anam, another urban teacher, reported their optimistic views regarding the assessment of oral skills in the near future.

> Goutum: Yes, the government has decided not only to practice oral skills in an English classroom but also to assess these skills. So, NCTB has

allotted 10 marks for listening skill and 10 marks for speaking skill. These two skills will be conducted in public exams. Although not yet but very soon. However, the assessments will be done by the schools. Even many schools and their teachers are teaching and assessing these skills in their schools. For this reason, the Government is calculating and analysing the possibilities to introduce it in public exams. Recently, there has been a mutual dialogue between our Ministry of Education and the University of Manchester in providing technical support and training support for Bangladeshi educators, teachers, and experts so that we can implement tests of listening and speaking in public exams successfully.

Anam: These orals skills are supposed to be assessed internally at school exams but still these are not included in public exams. However, we assume that if these skills are included in public exams, we have to send the assessed marks to the Education Boards. Besides, *English for Today* textbooks of NCTB have exercises on listening proficiency and assessment instructions, for example, lesson 22 of the Grade 6 textbook instructs: "listen to the CD/audio and fill in the gaps of the following text."

Anam's comment opens up multiple questions about the assessment of oral skills in public examinations. Firstly, if the assessment of oral skills is included in the public examination, how it will be assessed in the schools. Anam assumes that oral skills could be assessed in schools internally and the marks could be sent to the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education but the issue of fairness and malpractice may arise. International literature of similar contexts in Asia (Butler, 2011) accentuates that there is a chance of biases and malpractice regarding the marking of the assessment of oral skills in schools. Moreover, it has not yet been decided whether oral skills will be assessed in a *formative* or *summative* way. The criteria and means for the assessment of oral skills are not yet prescribed by NCTB although the national curriculum for English 2012 distributed 10 marks each for listening and speaking skills (Appendix H). It has also been shown that the SSC sample English question paper (Appendix I) proposed by NCTB in the English textbook for Paper one allocates 20 marks for oral skills, as it has proposed 80 marks for the test of reading and writing skills. So, the tension arises whether 20% of marks (10+10) for oral skills (listening + speaking) is enough to improve interactive competence in everyday life. Several international research on

similar EFL contexts shows that the allocation of more marks is needed for oral skills. For example, in Nepal, English is a foreign language but the country allowed 25% of marks out of 100 marks in their public examination called School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination. The exam is controlled by SLC examination Board under the Ministry of Education, Nepal (Dawadi, 2018). However, Appendix J has shown that the 2018 English question paper for the SSC examination, designed by the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education that assessed the English subject was based on only reading and writing skills for 100 marks in total without allocating 20 marks for the assessment of oral skills. The main reason is that NCTB has not yet proposed a sample question paper, either in the secondary textbook or in its English curriculum policy document, that indicates how the oral skills will be assessed in both school and public examinations.

Moreover, another problematic question arises. If oral skills are assessed by the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISEs) rather than assessed in schools, are the BISEs capable of conducting the assessment process? There are issues in terms of time, space for test-setting, training expert test conductors and designers, and developing relevant test equipment. There are nine Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education that are responsible for executing the public examinations, such as SSC and HSC examinations (Ministry of Education, 2006). More than 1,774,533 students sit for the SSS examination from 8,551 institutions in 3,412 centres around the country ("SSC, equivalent exams begin," 2018).

The development of curriculum, textbooks and assessment is a continuous process for better teaching and learning outcomes. As far as the practice of oral skills is concerned, it is reported by the participants that there is a difference between urban and rural contexts in terms of conducting oral assessments. Participants seemed to perceive a significant difference between the resources of urban schools and those of rural schools, especially in terms of the skills of teachers in ICT use and digital materials.

The importance of oral skills for language proficiency

> It is very commonly seen in most job advertisements in Bangladesh that the candidate must have a strong command of both communicative and written English.
>
> (The Head of NCTB)

> Oral proficiency in English has become one of the key requirements to get a job in Bangladesh at present.
>
> (Shahed, urban English teacher)

The statements by the Head of NCTB and Shahed emphasises how oral skills in the English language are equally important to written proficiency in job advertisements and to get jobs in Bangladesh. They seem to indicate the importance of oral skills and perhaps suggest that if oral skills are practised properly from a young age; students may not have to face difficulty in getting a job in the Bangladesh job market. The comments align with a key objective of the current National Curriculum 2012 for English: "teaching-learning activities in English to function in an international context with confidence" (p. 35) and "To help students acquire appropriate language and communicative competence for the next level of education" (p. 36). However, the problematic issue is that the curriculum, policymakers and the teachers I interviewed have identified the importance of oral skills but the teaching and assessment of oral skills are still grey areas. These are mapped in curriculum policy but not yet in functional mode. Some of the interviewed teachers and one of the policymakers discussed the barriers to implementing oral skills in classroom teaching and assessment. Rumel and Saif noted that due to the absence of assessment of oral skills at the secondary level, the tests of oral skills seem unfamiliar to the post-secondary Bangla-medium students when they sit for listening and speaking tests in IELTS for jobs or higher education abroad. Moreover, both Rumel and Saif stated that oral skills help improve language proficiency and, in particular, that listening proficiency helps develop a speaking skill for overall communicative proficiency. Shamima, one of the urban teachers, asserted the need to establish an English language lab in secondary schools for developing oral skills. She stated:

> If an English language lab can be set up in every school, the students can have regular opportunities to do learning activities based on verbal presentations. This practice will help students develop their oral skills. I mean by doing verbal interaction of learning activities, students will overcome their hesitation by interacting face to face in English.

Shamima's observation accentuates that English language labs could create an opportunity for students to practice oral English language regularly. However, as most schools and in particular, schools in rural areas, have resource constraints, setting up a language lab may be an effective step but a difficult task. Shahnaz, another urban English teacher, also suggested

the importance of oral skills in changing the classroom environment:

> I think the inclusion of oral skills has made the classroom environment from lecture-based to interactive mode. This change will help students improve their oral skills gradually which is very important for them.

Shahnaz's statement emphasises that the practice of oral skills can play a positive role in transforming the classroom environment from a lecture-driven to a communicative environment. The inclusion of oral skills makes a class interactive. Her phrase 'very important' might be seen to imply that the development of oral skills would put students in a better position for real-life opportunities, such as for the job market that Shahed and the Head of the Curriculum also emphasised earlier. Sultana (2016) argues that lack of oral proficiency in English hinders Bangladeshi graduates from entering the development sectors of Bangladesh for jobs and that without such proficiency; they lag in workplaces or even do not get equal opportunities in getting jobs.

Moreover, recently, while talking about the importance of oral skills in the job markets in Bangladesh, an eminent English professor (Bhottacharja, 2019) of Dhaka University of Bangladesh mockingly articulated the harsh reality. He said, "আমাদের দেশে কোনো যুবক অন্য সব বিচারে যত অপদার্থই হোক না কেন, শুধু ইংরেজি জানার কারণেই তাকে স্মার্ট মনে করা হয়। চাকরির বাজারে তার চাহিদা ইংরেজিতে দুর্বল, কিন্তু অন্য সব ব্যাপারে দক্ষ কোনো যুবকের চাইতে অনেক অনেক বেশি।" [In our country, if a person is worthless in every way, s/he is still considered smarter than others only because of the communicative competence in English. In the job market, the demand is more for a person having only the skill of communicative competence in English than those who are not competent in English but have all the relevant skills required for a job].

The importance of listening skill for language proficiency

A range of opinions by several participants acknowledged that listening skill is very important for communicative competence in the 21st century and helps develop speaking skill and different aspects of language such as vocabulary, pronunciation, accents, and expressions. The following two statements focused on the influence of listening skill on making effective communication by understanding and following the speaker:

> Rahim (curriculum-material developer of NCTB): The pattern of 21st century effective communication depends on the understanding of the speaker through listening. If

a person does not understand the speaker first, he or she cannot reply properly to make the effective communication.

Shiraji (Experienced IELTS test-taker): When I listen to the native speakers of English, I always try to follow their way of speaking to improve my speaking skill.

Rahim states that to communicate effectively in the 21st century, it is necessary to understand the speaker first by listening. However, his use of the word 'understanding' can be further discussed as there are three types of 'understanding'– *intelligibility*, *comprehensibility*, and *interpretability* in listening skill to evaluate the listener's ability to understand the speaker (Jenkins, 2000; Smith & Nelson, 1985). The type of 'understanding' is relevant to determine the level of effective communication among interlocutors. Rahim's further use of wording – 'reply properly' probably denoted the need for understanding of all three types by the listener. Shiraji also highlighted the influence of listening skill on improving the speaking skill of a learner. His conscious following of the native speakers helped him develop his speaking skill. It is relevant here to comment that Shiraji's focus on listening skill was only on the product of listening but not on the process of listening. He targeted to improve his speaking skill by following certain aspects of speaking from native speakers. He did not target the parsing and utilisation stages of listening to the speaker by focusing on the process of improving his metacognitive strategies of listening skill to facilitate the comprehension of spoken discourse. Renandya and Hu (2018) argue that auditory input through both product and process of listening skill is important for a learner's overall language development. The following statements focused on the influence of listening skill on overall communicative competence:

Mahbub (urban teacher): The uneducated or semi-educated people who work in Arabic-speaking countries in the Middle East develop their Arabic language for communication within 6 months of staying there. Many of them told me that they developed the language following the speaking of Arabic people in different everyday situations. So, listening input is important to develop the communicative skill of a language.

Saif (IELTS trainer): I think language learning is an imitative process. A learner can infer so many things about a language at the receiver's end from a speaker. For example, unintentionally, a learner imitates a speaker to learn the accent, and pronunciation and a learner can learn a new word when he listens

to that speaker. Even if the speaker uses the word in a context twice or thrice, the learner understands the denotation of the word and tries to use that word in his conversation.

Rumel (IELTS trainer): To understand the impact of listening skill over speaking skill being an IELTS preparatory course trainer, I conducted the speaking sessions before conducting the listening sessions for a batch and graded their speaking band score. In another batch, I conducted the listening sessions first and conducted speaking sessions later and graded their speaking band score. When I compared the average band score of the speaking test, I found that the batch which had their listening sessions earlier than the speaking sessions did better in their performance.

The comments of Mahbub, Saif, and Rumel further highlight that listening skill could help improve the communicative competence of the English language. Mahbub's anecdote related to the uneducated or semi-educated Bangladeshi workers in Arabic-speaking countries who developed their communicative skills in Arabic echoes Saif's use of the word 'imitation' for language learning. Rumel's statement of his self-conducted experimental result argues that better listening comprehension may lead to better speaking performance. All of them denote that listening skill is very crucial for a language learner to improve communicative skills only by following consistently a speaker of a language while staying in that specific country or for the need of communication. Their statements can be linked to the concept − *Noticing Hypothesis* −which states that listening for L2 input could not become intake for language learning until they are noticed (Schmidt, 2010). Although it is our natural tendency to perceive speaking as the main index for communicative competence, however, we cannot achieve speaking proficiency without proper listening comprehension first (Brown & Lee, 2015; Richards, 2015).

However, Taher and Ashek, in particular, focused on improving pronunciation and the vocabulary knowledge of the English language through listening skill:

Taher (rural teacher): Actually, through listening input, students can learn new words, and new expressions in English, which they can apply during their speaking. They can standardise their own pronunciation of English through listening practice with different audio as well as video content.

> Ashek (IELTS trainer): If anyone wants to develop speaking skill, listening skill is helpful to improve pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge of the English language.

Taher reported that listening is also helpful in improving the speaking skill of a student by listening to a variety of listening materials. Listening skill could also help the students to improve their pronunciation and word stock by following the speaker. If the students need to improve their speaking skill they need to listen more carefully to a variety of audio-visual materials. Taher's comment emphasises that learners need to learn 'listening to learn' (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012) to improve their pronunciation, vocabulary, and new expressions in English. Yildiz and Albay (2015) argued that learners acquire the correct pronunciation of words and also how to use those words into sentence structures correctly through the listening process. Taher's use of the phrase "standardising their own pronunciation" reflected that the pronunciation of the students of rural areas is not standard. So, to make their pronunciation more *intelligible*, Taher emphasised more listening practice through audio and video content. Furthermore, Ashek also highlighted the importance of listening skill to improve the speaking skill of the learners. He further added that listening skill could also play a role in improving the pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge of a learner. Ashek's reflection on "vocabulary knowledge" indicates that vocabulary knowledge is an important aspect of learning English that could be improved through listening skill. Many researchers (Coxhead, 2015; Folse, 2004; Nation & Hamilton-Jenkins, 2000; Staehr, 2008) argued that vocabulary knowledge is a significant predictor of determining L2 learners' communicative competence in English. However, Ashek's statement about how to improve vocabulary through listening skill is a significant one as vocabulary knowledge is a precondition for listening comprehension. Similarly, listening can also serve as a useful source for vocabulary acquisition (Zeeland, 2013). Nonetheless, considerably fewer empirical studies have documented the relationship between vocabulary improvement via listening skill and vocabulary improvement via reading skill so far (Nation & Newton, 2009). Hamid, an English-subject adviser of NCTB and the Head of NCTB further pointed out that language input through reading is not sufficient to improve the English language; however, listening input is also needed:

> The input is needed. The language input should come from the teachers at the primary level and then at the secondary level. The input should also come from audio-video of English conversations, movies, news, etc. However, in our country, the main problem

> is that teachers don't speak English in the classroom. Only reading input is not enough to learn a language.

Hamid's statement emphasises simultaneous input for language learning by listening and reading as language input through reading only did not seem to him sufficient. However, his reflection pointed out that teachers could be the main source of listening input in a classroom along with other secondary sources of listening input but teachers are not able to play the role. The probable reasons are teachers' lack of confidence and command over speaking fluency and their non-standardized accent. Another probable reason could be that teachers' may not feel the urge to focus on improving the oral skills of the students as these are not assessed for grading purposes. Rahim's speech aligns with Hamid's statement regarding secondary input that the students could receive through an audio-visual medium. He said:

> There are lots of students who receive input from the English language for their own interests through English movies and English news and so on. For example, my son developed his English proficiency by watching Australian Master Chef on TV. So, I think listening input is essential to improve language learning.

Rahim's anecdote about his son regarding the TV show *Australian Master Chef* demonstrates the process of language improvement through audio-visual listening input. However, from Rahim's observation, it is palpable that the receiving of language input depends on the interest of its receiver, which means motivational factors can play a vital role in more listening input. Moreover, the language input of Rahim's son from the *Australian Master Chef* programme also demonstrates that there are a huge number of out-of-class opportunities for a learner apart from in-class activities. Goutum's observation affirms the need for a basic sequence for language learning which is absent in the Bangladeshi context of English language learning:

> Ideally, listening skill should be learned first. For example, in our mother tongue, first, we listen to learn the language and gradually listening moves us to speak, and gradually the time comes when we start learning reading, and finally, we start learning the writing. The thing is not done in that way.

Rumel and Saif, the two IELTS trainers, who have been preparing the post- higher secondary students for an IELTS test with the experience of ten years, also reported their observations regarding the impact of listening skill on improving speaking skill and an important role to improve learners' overall language proficiency. Rumel said:

> Students' learning of the English language is incomplete if the students do not develop their communicative competence by listening to authentic English that can help them to improve their speaking skill.

Rumel's comment implies that communicative competence should be a primary criterion to judge whether a student has learned English or not. Moreover, he also suggests that if a student needs to develop speaking skills, "listening to authentic English" will help. His use of the term "authentic English" is a problematic one. It suggests a bias towards the English of BANA countries as the language learners of the 21st century need to process not only the "authentic English" but also a wide variety of non-native English. In the age of digitisation with global English and an estimated one billion L2 users (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2006) that may nearly double by the year 2020, students might be supposed to receive a variety of English speaking with a variety of accents, tones, and intonations. So, it is problematic to argue that other varieties of Englishes, apart from the English of BANA countries, are inauthentic and cannot be used to develop the English listening skill of the students. As digital learners, students may be exposed to a variety of English listening to improve their English proficiency. Saif further reported how listening could play a part, particularly in the specific areas of the English language. He stated:

> In our education system, we do not test listening skill in secondary and higher secondary public exams. So, our teachers and students think that listening is unnecessary and a waste of time as it is not assessed in the exams…but they don't realize that listening can play an important role in improving learners' overall language proficiency. Here, learners only focus on rote memorisation through reading and writing for passing the exam. They apply grammar knowledge in an orthodox way to learn English…but they don't know that vocabulary, pronunciation, and chunks of expressions can be developed by listening to English news, podcasts, and other learning materials of English. This concept is missing in our country.

Saif's statement re-emphasises the absence of assessment of listening skill in an education system that is dependent on the exam-driven. He also argued that although both teachers and learners consider listening skill in connection to assessment procedures, good listening skills might be effective in developing specific aspects of the English language, such as vocabulary, and pronunciation. The next two chapters report in detail how interview participants perceive the teaching of listening, the challenges they face, and the difficulties students face while practising listening and discuss strategies to overcome such difficulties. The chapters also

discuss the aspects of the English language that could be improved by developing students' listening comprehension skills.

Discussion on emergent themes of this chapter

The participants in the study addressed a range of issues regarding the impact of a colonial legacy on English language teaching and learning. They also addressed the current Bangladeshi debates about the colonial impact of English language education, the methodology of CLT, the need to customise CLT for the local context, confusion about the practice of CLT, blame game between policy-makers and ground people, disconnections of policy, practice, and negligence of the importance of oral skills for English language education and in particular, the importance of listening skill for English language proficiency.

The history of English language education in Bangladesh has been the legacy of colonisation. However, although the colonisers introduced the English language, they did not formulate any clear language policy in the sub-continent at that time. The impact of colonialism may be considered to be two-folded. One is, as discussed in this chapter, the direct legacies from when Bangladesh, as part of India, was a British colony. And another is a neo-colonial impact whereby various donor agencies advise on and even demand specific directions in curriculum policy and teaching methodology without critical analysis of the contextual differences between the West and Bangladesh. Besides, attitudes towards the teaching of the English language have been influenced by changes in the country's political regimes as different governments prioritise English or relegate it to a less important position. Therefore, methods of teaching the English language have changed many times since the independence of Bangladesh. However, the quality of English learning has not been changed as needed. Consequently, the effort to implement a CLT approach has given rise to confusion in the classrooms of many Bangladeshi schools. Environmental issues such as large class sizes, improper seating arrangements (such as the learners keeping themselves seated at a motionless place), exam-oriented instruction, and low proficiency of students also influenced CLT practices. Besides, many researchers have argued that effectively implementing CLT in the Asian context is almost impossible. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, English teachers in Bangladesh are encouraged to implement CLT for developing students' skills in English. So, the urge for the glocalisation of the CLT approach is needed.

The challenge of urban-rural contextual difference is another tension in Bangladesh that has an impact on the overall quality of English language education. Several participants have

reported that not only the students but also the teachers of rural areas failed to keep pace with their urban counterparts. They reported that rural teachers are incompetent in terms of communicative competence in English and classroom practice of oral skills. The students also lack competence in both oral and written skills of English and perform low in the public exams in English subjects. Several research studies also found that social position and background could affect language competency as these factors encompass pragmatic and psychological aspects of language comprehension (Cook, 2016; Vandergrift & Goh, 2009). Due to the impact of a long tradition of using the Grammar-Translation Method for teaching English, many teachers hold a traditional mindset, and they are reluctant to adopt CLT-based methods. However, the reality is that students who learn English from Grade I to Grade 12 still struggle with it even after going to university. Therefore, there is a perceived tension between a grammar-based approach and the CLT approach to teaching and learning English in terms of effective learning outcomes. Moreover, there is another tension about whether literary texts should be used as language materials. Al Amin (2017) has reported that there are teachers at Dhaka University who strongly advocate for the inclusion of literature in EFT textbooks. A similar argument was put forward in a seminar organised by the Bangladesh English Language Teachers' Association (BELTA) recently. However, the question arises about which form of literary texts can be adopted as language materials. Violetta-Irene (2015) prompts a consideration that short fiction can be used for language materials through CLT because this form of a literary text can present not only language but also the lived experience. The world of short fiction can mirror and project the practical use of language in our lives as the characters in short fiction act out similarly to the way people carry out their daily lives. Besides, recent research focuses more on grammaring than grammar (Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Nan, 2015) as English grammar is not only a set of specific structures but also an important resource for meaning-making and using language appropriately in a certain communicative context. Recently, a veteran academic-cum-politician named Abdur Razzak has expressed his concern about the communicative role of English in a seminar at a private university in Bangladesh. He accentuated this notion by saying, " English is not a language only; English is an instrument to communicate" (JABI er PhD nimnomaner, 2019, p.3).

Therefore, underlying the methodological debates about English language education, there are two significant emergent problems. First, whether grammar should be taught in an embedded way as many teachers and policymakers think that it is not useful to teach

grammar implicitly through the CLT approach. There is also a misconception among teachers that CLT means teaching no grammar. But in reality, CLT may teach grammar in context more effectively than teaching grammar directly. Some teachers have also tried to teach grammar implicitly following the CLT approach but were ineffective. It is because they did not follow the presentation sequences suggested in the teacher's manual due to their lack of pedagogical training on the CLT approach. The other is whether something new should be brought in. The current discussion on language teaching in Bangladesh talks about using multiple processes, such as *principled eclecticism* based on the needs and the levels of the students, so that the method is fitted to the learner, not the learner if fitted in the method. So, in learner-centred teaching, a single teaching method is usually not employed, and teachers need to navigate through different methods of teaching (Mozayan, 2016; Ur, 2017, May 22).

There is a gap that appears between what policymakers have said and what the teachers have perceived in terms of dealing with oral skills in both classroom teaching and assessment. Although the participants who are teachers reported that they received training in CLT, the training was not sufficient and the training programs were not aligned to the reality of their classroom contexts. A range of statements is concerned with the necessity of developing specialised training courses on the oral skills of the English language.

The debate on English as a second or foreign language is also going on although the curriculum policy for English education has recognised it as a foreign language (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a). It is because there is a gap, as the policies do not reflect the social reality and current needs of the country. Considering this ground reality and to end up the debate over the status of English as a language, recently, a lawyer appealed to the High Court of Bangladesh in a petition to recognise English as a second language ("HC refuses to recognise English as a second language," 2019, April 21). The lawyer cited that English was used as a *de facto* second language by all the BISEs and added that English should be given proper status as a second language to create a digital Bangladesh as the reality demanded; however, this was rejected by the High Court. Therefore, it is important to fix the position of the English language from its grey area to cohere the reality and the policy.

As there are inadequate in-service training opportunities for teachers and an absence of pre-service training programs, the question arises of how the teachers can teach something that they do not know. Participants identified the monolingual context of Bangladesh as a barrier to secondary students developing their oral skills. In Bangladesh, there is no need for any

lingua franca other than the standard colloquial form of the Bangla language, whereas, an interactive atmosphere is very important to practice a language for learning. However, there is no such scope for the secondary English students to develop skills of oracy in Bangladesh as they live in a homogeneous Bangla-speaking society. The other reason is that English, being taught as a subject, is a skill-based subject, not a content-based one. Therefore, the regular communicative practice of the language is necessary for better proficiency in the language.

Moreover, some participants have reported that secondary students were hesitant to communicate in English in the classroom, but that could be minimised by teachers' initiation of face-to-face interaction with the students following the *Interaction Hypothesis*[17] (Long, 1996). Skills of oracy are also absent in teaching and learning of Bangla language as well. So, the students are not able to transfer their L1 skills of oracy to their L2 skills of oracy which could help them practice oral skills in English. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) argued that if the learners of a language were weak in their L1 listening, they were also weak in their L2 listening. Similarly, if the learners were good listeners in their L1, there might be a good chance for them to do well in L2 listening tasks (Vandergrift, 2013).

The data from the participants have postulated the spectrum of English language education planning and policy in the Bangladeshi context in connection to multiple disconnections between the curriculum, classroom teaching-learning process, and assessment procedure. A number of participants have specifically reported multiple reasons for the disconnections between policy, classroom practice and assessment of oral skills. They have identified that there is a lack of liaison between the various government departments, such as the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Ministry of Education, and the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education to make coherence in teaching, learning, and assessment of oral skills. This research clarifies the nature of the disconnection between the intended English assessment policy directions and the pattern of ongoing practice. So, this research has underlined the need for a positive rapport between the policy and practice of the curriculum. Existing research has also emphasised that the impact of such a disconnection between policy

[17] It stated that the development of language proficiency is promoted by face to face interaction and communication and language comprehensible input from the interlocutors are important for language learning. The comprehensible input is greatly increased when the learners have to negotiate for meaning with the interlocutor.

and practice substantially disrupts the overall quality of secondary English language education (Nur & Islam, 2018).

Another major obstacle identified by the participants is the dominance of examinations. The exam-driven teaching and learning have restricted the curriculum alignment with the assessments of oral skills in public examinations, such as SSC and HSC examinations. Although 10 marks each for assessing both listening and speaking are allotted in the Curriculum Policy for English in 2012, these skills are not assessed in public examinations. Consequently, both the teachers and students do not feel the urge to improve their oral skills. International literature acknowledged that if listening proficiency were not tested being an important aspect of second language learning, teachers would not pay attention to teaching it (Richards, 2015). Other researchers in the Bangladeshi context (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018) also argued that if listening and speaking skills would not be part of the public examination, these would not be practised by students and teachers in classroom activities and often neglected. As a result, public examinations lack *content validity*. If a language test needs to have *content validity*, it must have the constitutions and representations of a sample of the language skill to measure that with which it is meant to be concerned (Hughes, 2014; Kabir, 2018). However, the public examinations do not assess all four skills and therefore, cannot measure the communicative competence of the students (Sultana, 2018).

The primary intention of the curriculum policy is to develop and measure the communicative competence of the students. So, there is a clear disconnection between the aspiration of the National Curriculum for English (2012) and the public examinations. The participants have identified another problematic issue that is the fairness of assessment of oral skills if the skills are assessed for public examinations. Participants have reported that it is not fixed yet how oral skills will be assessed although they indicated a growing demand for the assessment of oral skills. The existing curriculum suggests that some participants stated that the assessment could be done at schools and the scores would be sent to the BISEs. However, participants are divided about this assessment procedure, as it seems that the abuse of the system may gloss over the malpractice of oral skills in schools. Al Amin (2017) also articulated this possible malpractice by the teachers if the oral skills were assessed in schools. The participants also identify the negligence of the importance of oral skills for English proficiency. There is a common perception among policymakers and teachers that oral skills are not considered important skills for learning and developing the English language.

Moreover, particularly, they are unaware of the benefits of improving listening proficiency to develop speaking as well as other aspects of language proficiency. They perceive that the students will develop listening skill automatically with time without teaching them. However, both the concepts 'listening to learn' and 'learning to listen' for language education (Vandergrift, 2004, 2013) are missing in the process of teaching listening skill in secondary English education in Bangladesh. It is also evident from the data that although some teachers teach the listening skill, however, they only focus on the "product" of listening rather than the "process" of listening for English language education. Moreover, as far as oral skills in classroom-based language learning are concerned, listening competence precedes speaking competence (Brown & Lee, 2015). As my discussion proceeded, problems and challenges were explored regarding teaching, learning, and assessment of listening skill at the secondary level in Bangladesh.

Chapter Six: Challenges of Listening Skill in Classroom Practice and Assessment Procedure

Introduction

In Chapter Two, I have discussed that since listening skill for language learning has just been introduced in secondary and higher secondary curriculum in Bangladesh, the teaching of listening has greater importance in the classroom. Chapter Five argues that language learning without oral skills has weakened Bangladeshi students' communicative competence because the students score good marks in exams assessed by their reading and writing, but they fail to communicate convincingly in their real-life situations. Therefore, considering the realities of the classroom teaching and the long tradition of explicit grammar-based teaching, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (2012a) adopted the notion of a "learning by doing" approach, indicating the use of English to meet contextual needs rather than a knowledge of grammar and structures in isolation. The current curriculum for secondary English education has been designed following the guidelines of the current Education policy 2010. The Education Policy 2010 incorporated both listening and speaking skills for its English language education. Therefore, the policymakers have designed curricula and English textbooks following the policy focusing more on English language practice in the classroom. However, although listening skill is now in policy and classroom practice, it is assessed neither in school exams nor in public exams at the secondary level.

However, teaching and testing listening skills are complex issues in Bangladesh. Listening skills are not only important for the test but also for overall English language proficiency. This chapter aims to explore the challenges of listening skill in English language education. It recapitulates several issues related to the challenges that make the implementation process of listening skill difficult for both policy and practice levels. It discusses the challenges of assessing and teaching the comprehension skills of listening in the classroom. The discussion may help Bangladeshi teachers to deal with the difficulties of teaching and assessing listening comprehension. The discussion may also help learners to develop their listening skill because language learning begins with listening. The data in this chapter have come from interviews with both urban and rural secondary English teachers and policymakers.

Challenges of classroom teaching of listening

Government policy, policymakers, and teachers emphasise the importance of English language education and relate it to the needs of society and produce properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs. So, the current focus of the National Curriculum for English 2012 shifted from traditional language learning to the development of competence for effective communication in real-life situations. This involves listening and speaking as well as reading and writing. Moreover, the National Curriculum (2012) accentuated listening and speaking skills to help students communicate orally, making provision for testing these two areas of skills. So, language competence has become more emphasised than language accuracy alone. However, like in many other countries, a disconnection has remained for Bangladesh between the policy and the implementation of listening skill in secondary classroom teaching of English.

Technical issues

The participants talked about the technical issues related to the teaching of listening. One of the major problems that appeared as one of the barriers to implement the teaching of listening in the classroom was technical issues. These were related mainly to the lack of power supply and internet access. Two of the urban teachers, Anam and Shahnaz, expressed their dissatisfaction:

> Anam: I face some technical problems when I conduct listening practice. The supply of electricity is not regular. Without electricity, I am not able to play the speaker and the PC. There is also a problem with the internet. Sometimes, the power supply is available, but the internet is disconnected or slow to download materials on time.

> Shahnaz: We need a smartphone or an audio player to practice listening in the classroom. If we want to use the school's laptop, we need electricity during the class…but there is an interruption in the electricity supply. Sometimes, it goes off in the middle of the listening practice.

Anam's statement highlights how the interrupted power supply affects listening practice. He also highlights the problems with internet access that prevented the downloads of materials for use to practice listening. From Anam's statement, it is also evident that he was willing to practice listening in the classroom and was positive about it. Shanaz's statement further

marks her as a technophile as she wanted to use a smartphone for listening practice despite the limitation of the electricity supply. However, the situation was more problematic as both of them identified the issue of slow internet connection as an obstacle to downloading the materials for listening practice. Moreover, 5% of the total population has an internet connection, and the cost of internet in the country is the second-highest in South Asia (Asian Development Bank, 2017). So, both the issues, power supply and internet connection with proper speed, have a negative impact on the practice of listening in a classroom. The Teachers' Curriculum Guide for English: Class VII (2017) also clearly mentioned that the listening exercises are given in the *English for Today* textbooks, but the listening texts and aural files are on the NCTB website from where any teacher can download and use them. It was promised by the government that it would ensure ICT facilities in all secondary educational institutes by 2021 as it took a nine-year project (2008-2017) in collaboration with the EIA project and another project named "Vision 2021" to provide technology-based English language education (Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology Bangladesh, 2009). Meanwhile, so far the government has been able to provide internet coverage to only some of the secondary schools out of 20449 in total (BANBEIS, 2017; "Schools under internet coverage," 2019). So, it is a long way to go yet to provide internet coverage to all the secondary schools with a huge number of students (more than 10,184,364) by 2021 to facilitate access to online listening materials for the teachers. However, several research studies (Karim & Mohamed, 2019; Rahman & Akter, 2015) argued that despite the availability of the internet along with ICT supportive devices, a large number of teachers do not use ICT support for practising communicative English in the classroom. The "Vision 2021" project was intended to equip secondary English teachers with ICT knowledge to facilitate the CLT approach to practise listening activities. The EIA project provided ICT supportive equipment to a significant amount of teachers with a Secure Digital (SD) card loaded with classroom materials and an audio speaker to practise English communicatively. However, it seemed that teachers were not confident enough to integrate ICT materials in the classroom pedagogy for listening practice.

Another research study (Babu & Nath, 2017) found that although the students were able to watch and listen to different language tasks through multimedia, they did not actively participate in a question-answer session. The teachers also could not involve themselves in collaborative learning tasks as they struggled with the whole technical process of how to practice the material properly. In group activities, very limited communication occurred

among the learners which ultimately hindered the proper teaching-learning process using ICT.

Technophobe teachers

Another tension that many of the participants cited was teachers' phobia of technology use. The rural teachers, in particular, explained their technology uneasiness. Yunus and Mamun, two English teachers in rural areas, said:

> Yunus: Ummm…no, I have no idea about how to download the listening clips from NCTB websites. I have little knowledge of computers and the internet. I feel uneasy using the computer and the internet. This is really a big obstacle for a teacher in the 21st century.
>
> Mamun: I used a multimedia classroom once to teach 'narration' but I did not feel comfortable. Now I avoid using multimedia.

Yunus's statement reflects that his inability to download the clips was not only because of his lack of ICT knowledge but also because of his uneasiness about using technology such as computers and the internet. He is also well aware of this issue as he identifies this *uneasiness* as one of the big challenges for a teacher in the twenty-first century. It is palpable from his statement that teachers must have the relevant ICT knowledge to teach in the 21st century, even if they teach in a rural area.

Recent literature in the Bangladeshi context (Mou, 2016) also proposed that ICT could improve language teaching by enabling a pedagogical shift through interactive language learning between a teacher and the learners. However, the tension of applying ICT in language classrooms sparked a debate in research about whether the use of ICT can induce language education, or if it is just one of the multiple means to aid pedagogy. Several researchers argued that ICT could not only facilitate the learning of a language but also transform teaching if it is integrated into the classroom effectively (Günüç, 2017; Sejdiu, 2018). However, other researchers emphasised the pedagogical skills of a teacher for language education over technological usage. They argued that integration of ICT could not automatise quality education as it is not pedagogy or methodology, but it could help increase meaningful two-way interaction in the classroom (Huhn, Dassier, & Liu, 2015; Kabir, 2017).

So, what matters is pedagogy and content knowledge: technology is only a tool to help the teaching and learning process.

Mamun, however, tried to use technology by using multimedia to teach "narration" as a part of grammar teaching. His issue of discomfort might be for two reasons. Either he lacked the proper skills to operate multimedia, or he lacked the knowledge of the specific programme, such as TPACK[18], to combine pedagogy, technology, and content of his teaching in the classroom. Mou (2016) explained that there is a scarcity of English teachers in Bangladesh having the combined knowledge of pedagogical, technological, and content to use the advantages of ICT in a language classroom. Moreover, there are constraints in resource-related supports, especially in rural schools, as well as in teachers' knowledge of ICT and its successful use in classrooms (Sultana & Haque, 2018). Therefore, the integration of ICT in language education is problematic in Bangladesh.

In support of the policy goal, Goutum emphasised that the teachers must have the training to tackle their technophobia and to make the classroom interesting by using ICT and so motivate other teachers to do the same. He stated:

> Yes, some teachers are technophobes. All teachers are not technically sound. This is why the training programme is offered. The training will help them to disregard their fear. When some of the teachers tell other colleagues that using ICT makes the class interesting, then other teachers will be motivated to follow ICT-based classrooms.

Goutum's statement acknowledges that the training program could contribute to reducing technophobia in teachers. He also points out that training programs should not be targeted to develop only technically sound teachers to use ICT in the classroom. Goutum here indicates that the training programs should also inject a positive mindset among the teachers so that they can not only use ICT in their teaching by themselves but also motivate and encourage other teachers to use ICT for making a class more interesting as well as interactive. Goutum's use of words, "using ICT makes the class interesting" indicates that the use of ICT could make a class interactive in two ways: teacher- students and student-student, and those interactions could further encourage the practice of both listening and speaking skills. Research also argued that when teachers use multimedia and ICT tools in a language class, students enjoy their lessons (Sultana & Haque, 2018). Another research study highlighted that

[18] A framework for instruction in combination of three types of knowledge that an instructor needs: pedagogical knowledge, technological knowledge, and content knowledge (M. J. Koehler & P. Mishra, 2009).

technology makes it easy for teachers to facilitate communicative practice in a classroom and at the same time improve their own communicative competence (Karim, Mohamed, & Rahman, 2017). However, if teachers are not well trained they may not be able to use the full potential of these technologies in their classroom and merely use them for presentation and demonstration (Sultana & Haque, 2018). However, the progress of training is at a slow pace in terms of the need. Out of 243,117 secondary teachers, only about 12,000 teachers from secondary and higher secondary teachers have received training on how to develop digital content for classroom lessons to teach and use the internet (Asian Development Bank, 2017). So, the number of ICT-trained English teachers among all other teachers is palpably less than the needed number.

So, the aspiration of the government to fulfil Vision 2021 by using the knowledge of English as a tool for development (Ministry of Education, 2010) might be hindered if these technological supports are not used fully in classroom teaching. Moreover, there is a serious concern about the efficacy of the training programs for ICT knowledge. The next section discusses this issue in detail.

Inadequate training for improving teachers' ICT knowledge

Ministerial sources have claimed that Bangladesh had made tremendous progress in ICT service and infrastructure in the last decade (Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology Bangladesh, 2009). Therefore, to use the optimum benefit of ICT in educational improvement, teachers are the key agents. However, many policy-related participants and the teachers from both rural and urban schools reported that secondary English teachers lack sufficient ICT knowledge to implement technology in their language teaching classroom due to the lack of ICT knowledge and feel the need for proper training. Rahim and the Head of the Curriculum, two participants who are policy-makers, accentuated the issue:

> Rahim: We first proposed to create a CD of the listening contents and distribute to all over the country…but our Secretary of Education argued about this process. He told that Internet service reached everywhere…even in rural areas. So, he suggested preparing the listening contents downloadable by accessing our NCTB website. However, rural teachers do not know how to access the internet and browse our website. So, they need ICT training along with their subject-related training.

> The Head of the Curriculum: I think an English teacher should have ICT knowledge besides his/her subject-related knowledge. We are not able so far to provide ICT-related training to all the secondary teachers. We have eight divisions and 64 districts. So, to provide the training to the teachers of the whole country, we have to think of a good plan.

Rahim's statement indicates that there is tension about the distribution platform of digital content of listening practice materials. His statement also indicates an attitude of imposition by the top policy-makers and a top-down approach to the curriculum policy of Bangladesh. This imposition of curriculum policy ignores the real problems on the ground. Although internet facilities are available in rural areas, they are often not accessible to the teachers, as the teachers, more specifically, the teachers in rural areas are not trained for using the internet to download and practice online listening materials. They are not able to get the benefit of the downloadable listening materials by conducting listening practice sessions. However, the provision of listening materials in CD format might also not work in rural areas: some of the participants reported that the headteacher would lock the teaching materials that were given by the NCTB in their cabinet and not allow access to the teachers. So, the listening materials on CD could also face similar treatment. Rahim also emphasises the need for ICT training for teachers parallel to their subject-related training. However, his opinion about the training plan seems to pose a mammoth task for the policymakers, as the Head of the Curriculum also acknowledges. The use of the phrase "we have to think of a good plan" by the Head of the Curriculum indicates that although policymakers have introduced listening skill in their secondary textbooks and made listening materials available, they are unsure about the training procedure of the secondary teachers. Although Goutum, an English textbook developer, stated that the government had started training sessions on both ICT and English as a subject for the teachers through different projects, he did not give information about the procedures for carrying out these goals. He said:

> The Government is providing ICT training for the teachers. There are many different types of projects to provide ICT training. We are increasing ICT-literate teachers in our education system. Teachers should have motivation for ICT-related as well as subject-related training.

Goutum's statement signals that there are teachers who lack motivation for both ICT and subject-related training. However, when I interviewed them, urban English teachers acknowledged their lack of ICT training. They also expressed their desire to be trained about how to apply ICT knowledge in their language classroom. Their statements are as follows:

> Shahnaz: Of course, ICT-related knowledge is very important for a teacher. If a teacher does not know what ICT is, they will not be able to download content, prepare their digital contents to present in a class, and browse the internet. Even to operate our multimedia classroom, a teacher needs technological knowledge.
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> Nurul: Every teacher should receive training on ICT just after joining their job to make multimedia content on his or her subject. A teacher then will be able to collect teaching materials from different websites. The use of multimedia classrooms can also make teaching and learning effective.
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> Shahed: I believe that to teach listening contents of our textbooks or to prepare listening exercises by ourselves, most of our secondary teachers have neither pedagogical nor ICT knowledge.

The abovementioned statements of urban English teachers express that although they lack technical knowledge about how to use ICT, they are inclined to use technological support in their classroom teaching. Moreover, both Shahnaz's and Nurul's statements emphasise the necessity of ICT training for the teachers of secondary schools. Shahed's statement further accentuates the importance of not only ICT training but also pedagogical training as both types of training complement each other. The statements of urban teachers indicate that their professional preparation is one of the most important parts of implementing ICT in language education. So, they emphasise the need for in-service training. Their statements indicate that secondary English teachers receive neither pre-service nor in-service training for their continuous professional development as a teacher. Training for teachers seems inadequate in Bangladesh. Nurul further highlights the necessity of in-service training on ICT so that teachers can use multimedia content from different websites in teaching their lessons appropriately.

Although there is a gap between urban and rural English education and its quality, there is not much difference in terms of the paucity of ICT training for the teachers and the lack of ICT

usage. Several rural teachers accentuated their technological weaknesses and scarcity of given training on ICT.

> Kamal: Actually, I have little training on how to conduct a listening class using multi-media. So, this is my weakness as a teacher.
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> Mamun: I have no training in ICT − even though many of our teachers do not know much about smartphones. They even don't have an email ID. They also don't have basic knowledge of MS office.
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> Solaiman: I heard that the listening contents of English textbooks are available on the NCTB website. We can download that if we like it. But I have never downloaded that content. So, I practice listening through my oral input.

Kamal openly acknowledges that he did not receive either pre-service or in-service training on ICT. Although he has no training in ICT, however, he has the urge to gain ICT knowledge. In the age of technological competence, the inability to use educational technology such as multimedia prevents the facilitation of learning through digital tools. Kamal seems to signal that although he is a rural teacher and cannot get the skills and classroom facilities similar to the urban teachers, he is also aware of the influence of educational technology in classroom teaching, One reason might be that there is 98% penetration of the whole country by mobile phones (Ahmed & Kabir, 2018; Shaheen & Richard, 2013) with internet service, and he realises he cannot stay out of it. Or he might not have received the training on ICT for digital practice in teaching listening in a classroom. Another reason might be his intention to develop professionally to be a technically sound teacher for the 21st century. Mamun, another rural teacher, further emphasised that neither he nor his colleagues received any ICT training. He also highlighted that many teachers are ignorant about smartphones, having an email ID, or basic knowledge of MS office packages. However, Mamun's and Kamal's statements contradict Solaiman's statement. Solaiman's use of the words "we can download that" raises several issues regarding ICT use in a classroom for listening content. One indication could be teachers' lack of a positive attitude to use digital content for listening practice. The reason behind this could be the lack of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes for English teachers. Golam and Kusakabe (2018) also reported that there was no CPD training for secondary English teachers. Another reason might be teachers' lack of sufficient training to make them confident in using the

downloadable contents comfortably. There is a high chance that these teachers may not have received ICT training yet. The major ICT training project for the teachers was English in Action (EIA). The project placed mobile phones and the internet as the centre of its action to train the teachers on ICT use. At the completion of the project in 2017, EIA was supposed to have trained 51,000 Bangladeshi teachers under the ICT-enhanced teacher professional development (Ali, 2014b). However, the total number of secondary teachers was 234165 (BANBEIS, 2019). So, there was an indication that many teachers were left out of ICT training. Karim, Mohamed, and Rahman (2017) stated that the training under EIA provided the teachers with the ability to use a mobile application for teaching and learning English. However, several research studies argue that the major aim of the EIA project to attune teachers for teaching English using audio-visual aid in the classroom failed miserably (Anwaruddin, 2016). The training did not train the teachers on how to interweave technology in pedagogy and its content. The current government focused its project on improving the quality of education by increasing teachers' professional development through pedagogical and ICT training (Farhana & Chowdhury, 2019). Therefore, the successful deployment of audio-visual instruments for teaching by using digital content required TPACK knowledge (Harris & Hofer, 2011; Koehler & Mishra, 2009) which EIA did not provide. So, the country has a scarcity of skilled secondary English teachers who have the training on how to use technology to support the pedagogy of teaching English through relevant teaching content.

Limited class hours

Several participants raised the issue of insufficient class hours to conduct English classes for listening practice. Most of the secondary schools in Bangladesh conduct English classes every working day. The duration of an English class is usually 30-35 minutes each. The time limit of a class is also the same for other subjects although the contents of the English subject are practice-based, which requires more time to make the class reciprocal. The following statements by the participants' present opinions about the issue of limited class time:

> Shahnaz: The limited class hours are the main obstacle to practise listening in the classroom. A teacher needs at least an hour to perform pair or group tasks for listening practice...but I get only 30-35 minutes for a class hour. I have to maintain classroom discipline. I have to call the 70 to 80 roll numbers of the student during this time. So, I don't get time to practice listening. Most of the time I avoid it.

Shahed: Our English textbooks are designed in a chapter-wise format. The listening materials are available online according to the exercise tasks in the textbooks. But it takes time to play and practice the listening clips through multimedia and finish the exercises afterward followed by a discussion.

Taher: I think the duration of a class is a problem to practice listening. Within the limited class time, it becomes really difficult to conduct listening tasks and give feedback to the students. So, I cannot apply the training knowledge to make a pair or group for the practice.

Shahnaz, Shahed (urban English teachers), and Taher, a rural English teacher, stated that doing pair or group work for listening practice requires more time than the given time they have. Their comments highlight a common scenario of a classroom situation in Bangladesh. Shahnaz's use of phrases such as "maintaining classroom discipline" and "to call 70 to 80 roll numbers" highlights that an English teacher does not get a total classroom hour to teach. During class hours, a teacher needs to perform other non-teaching activities apart from the focus on the teaching-learning process. It might take at least five seconds to take the attendance of each student. If it were so, then a teacher would spend five to six minutes calling the roll numbers. So, non-teaching activities further reduce the time of the teaching and learning process out of the given classroom hours. This situation results in avoiding listening practice as the teacher might not be able to finish the relevant listening tasks that she or he would start. Shahed's phrase "takes time to play and practice" also indicates that a teacher cannot start listening practice immediately after beginning the class. The teacher needs to activate the full multimedia system to play listening texts in the class and prepare the students for listening practice. This process further reduces the amount of time from the given class hour (usually 30-35 minutes).

Taher's statement emphasises that giving feedback on the exercises of listening tasks is also time-consuming. So, the limited class hour is not enough to complete the process of listening practice and Taher might leave the practice half-done sometimes without being able to provide feedback on the mistakes or explain the answers. Karim and Mohamed (2019) also postulated that, because of the classroom context, teachers lose some time from the actual time that a class is allowed as the teachers usually need to go to a specific classroom where the multimedia is placed in order to use audio-visual activities for oral skills (Rahman & Akter, 2015). So far, the government has set up only a single classroom in each school with

multimedia support to practice digital content (Babu & Nath, 2017). So multimedia support is fixed in one room in most of the schools. Both the teacher and the students need to come to the room when a teacher wishes to use it for teaching. So, in the limited class time, it takes the students a few minutes to sit and prepare for the interactive session in the classroom (Babu & Nath, 2017). Based on the large body of evidence, we can see that the secondary teachers in the current study complained about how their class time shrank within the limited class time not to practice listening. Shahnaz mentioned that the usual time was 30-35 minutes for the total classroom teaching, whereas the *Teachers' Curriculum Guide* recommends that a class period should be exactly 50 minutes for the teachers covering the classroom preparation, presentation of the lesson along with its content, and assessment procedure (*Teachers' Curriculum Guide for English: Class VII*, 2017). However, in many schools, that time is not allocated. In the following section, a number of participants related to listening practice described other issues.

Teachers lack motivation

Some of the statements in this section suggested that apart from sufficient class time, there was another issue as a barrier to listening practice. A significant range of comments was concerned about the lack of motivation for teachers to practice listening activities. Kamal and Taher, English teachers from a rural school, asserted they were ICT-learned teachers. They had received training on ICT for communicative practice. They were well aware of the collaborative content-sharing web page for the teachers in Bangladesh. They said:

> Kamal: We can download some prepared listening materials and exercise sheets from a web page named "শিক্ষক বাতায়ন" [Shikkhok Batayon]. I can also use the readymade audio-visual materials in the classroom for English teaching. But our trainers advised us to prepare our materials and share the materials. If I want to make the contents for listening practice, it may take 2 to 3 hours every day to prepare for a class. I do not do it for the pressure of time constraints.

Taher: I took the 14-day training session on CLT. I have also had the 7-day follow-up training. Training geared me up. I learned different techniques to make the classroom interactive. However, I cannot apply the training knowledge of CLT properly to classroom practice. I have to prepare them for the lessons related to the SSC examination.

Kamal's mention of the webpage named "শিক্ষক বাতায়ন" [Shikkhok Batayon] indicates that although Kamal is a rural English teacher, he received ICT training to apply in classroom teaching. However, his use of the words "pressure of time constraint" is somewhat different from the opinions of Shahnaz, Shahed, and Taher cited earlier about a limited classroom hours for listening practice. Kamal does not mention the time constraints of classroom practice for listening skill. He mentioned constraints of time to download or prepare materials for conducting listening practice. It seems from his statement that he is reluctant and lacks the motivation to prepare oral materials and specifically the listening practice materials. Similarly, Taher, one of those rural teachers, received the 14-day training on CLT under English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP). He also received a 7-day follow-up. He acknowledged that the training "geared" him up and he learned different techniques. Nonetheless, he does not apply his training knowledge in classroom teaching. His excuse that he has to prepare the students for the SSC examination also suggests that there might be many teachers who ignore the practice of listening and speaking skills on the basis that both the skills are not assessed in the SSC exam.

Moreover, Taher's statement raises several issues. One of those issues could be teachers' lack of motivation in applying the knowledge and skills they acquired through training. An earlier study reported that ELTIP training did not yield any significant change in English teachers' communicative practice in a classroom (Karim, Mohamed, & Rahman, 2017). Teachers were volitionally stuck to the conventional Grammar-Translation Method because they were the product of the method. So, in a cyclic process, they also remained the followers of the method (Karim & Mohamed, 2019). So as they lacked a professional attitude to change themselves, they were likely to remain unchanged in their approach to classroom teaching (Al Amin, 2017; Rahman et al., 2018).

The other issue could be the disconnect between the current language testing and assessment procedure and the intended curriculum goals. This lack of alignment demotivates teachers from engaging in communicative practice (Rahman and Akter, 2015). One of the eminent

educationists of Bangladesh recently questioned both government and donor-aided projects and their training outcomes. She criticised the quality of the teachers' training, as the teachers were the main driving force for the quality of secondary education. Therefore, she stated, the teachers were not able to apply the training knowledge in the classroom, and so the classroom teaching could not fulfil the need of the time (Chowdhury, 2019).

Another issue could be that the training for the teachers does not cover sufficient components to increase their confidence and dexterity to operate communicative activities in the classroom. The relevant research also argued that to make a positive change in practice as well as in teachers' professional development, in-depth training was required. A short-term training program or workshop-based training sessions were found ineffective to bring differences in teachers' classroom practice (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Wei, Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010). Due to this situation, the researchers also argued that the efficacy of the training under the ELTIP project failed to make its intended impact on students' ability to use English communicatively (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018).

A dearth of trained teachers

A range of opinions from both policymakers and subject experts further reports that there is a dearth of trained teachers to practise listening.

> Hamid: Listening skill is very important for English language competence. Listening skill is the first step to learning any language. The language input should also come from the teachers at the primary level. But in our country, the main problem is that teachers are unable to conduct the class in English. They don't speak English in the classroom. So, they are unable to conduct the class in English. They require more training in oral skills. Then they won't hesitate to speak in English.

> Rashid: There is a paucity of trained teachers who can conduct listening and speaking skills in a classroom. Teachers also have a lack of confidence to practice these oral skills in a classroom.

> Goutum: Teachers also don't know how to conduct a listening class for language learning. They don't have confidence and oral fluency.

Hamid's statement highlights aspects of existing teachers' oral capacity. His use of the words "language input should also come from the teachers" and "they are unable to conduct the class in English," raise several tensions. His words highlight that the teachers could be the main source of the listening input for the students' language proficiency. As the secondary teaching culture in Bangladesh is teacher-centred, the teachers are the main source of language input booster to the students for listening practice. Previous research informed that only a few secondary teachers could speak English. So, when a teacher spoke in English in a classroom, students were motivated to practice listening (Podder, 2011). The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (2018) also emphasised that many students do not have the scope to listen to or practice English at home. The classroom is the only opportunity for them to listen and speak in English. So, if the teachers do not speak English, students would not receive aural input to deliver oral output. Therefore, the advantages of beginning by teaching oral skills would not be available if qualified teachers and exposure to a language environment do not exist (Kurita, 2012).

However, Hamid's words 'they don't speak English' tend to indicate the inefficacy of teachers' speaking and listening competence in English. It might again highlight that teachers are either less skilled because of less training or that they do not apply the knowledge gained in training to conduct the class using English. Whereas, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (2018) instructed the mandatory use of English as a medium of teaching English in a classroom. The authority found that most of the secondary English teachers did not use English as their medium of instruction in schools ("ইংরেজি বিষয়ের ক্লাস নিতে হবে ইংরেজিতেই," 2017). Hamid's use of the words "they don't speak English" suggests that teachers might feel shy because of their inefficacy in fluency and pronunciation. Goutum's and Rashid's statements support the comment from Hamid about why teachers do not speak English. Both Goutum and Rashid reported that lack of confidence and specific training on oral skills deters teachers from practising listening and speaking skills in the classroom. The teachers also lack motivation due to their embarrassment to practice English communicatively in the classroom. In this connection, the efficacy of the training for the teachers received considerable criticism (Hamid & Erling, 2016). The training provided by the donor-funded projects such as ELTIP, TQI-SEP, ETTE, and EIA surprisingly covered only 6.3% of components related to CLT and 5% of the curriculum related to English language teaching for the secondary teachers (Rahman et al., 2019). Whereas, training for teachers' language skills development should be given priority over training them in teaching

methodology or any such other areas (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2012a, p. 35).

Headteachers' traditional mindset

The participants reported different opinions about the role of headteachers or heads of an institute in fostering the practice of oral skills at secondary schools for English language education. Shamima, an English teacher at an urban school, experienced an unsupportive attitude from her headteacher as far as the practice of listening was concerned. She stated:

> I practice listening activities through pair or group tasks in the classroom. So, the classroom becomes a bit chaotic. The headteacher thinks that the teacher doesn't have control of the classroom. So, the headteacher often misunderstands the situation in the classroom. This mindset is one of the challenges to practice listening and speaking skills in a classroom.

Shamima's statement suggests that she possesses a positive attitude towards the practice of listening activities in English through pair or group tasks. However, her use of words regarding the headteacher − "the teacher doesn't have control" and "mindset is one of the challenges" − indicates that she did not receive positive feedback from the headteacher. Rather it suggests the embodiment of the traditional teaching culture of Bangladeshi schools. The teacher-centred classroom teaching is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. It traces its roots to a particular *language classroom ecology* [19]in the Bangladeshi education system. The ecology of the language classroom in Bangladesh s traditionally dominated by teachers. Teachers are in charge of classroom discourse. This situation has been a long tradition in Bangladesh. Recently, a nationwide survey by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) in secondary schools found the one-way lecture as the main method of teaching in the country's classrooms ("Secondary education in Bangladesh: Over 50% of secondary teachers can't prepare question papers," 2019). Shahed, an urban English teacher, further emphasised the traditional mindset of headteachers in secondary schools. He stated:

[19] A language classroom is not just a congregation place for learning but a micro social setting. In this setting, both the teacher and the learners interact as social members while communicating, negotiating and compromising with each other (Tudor, 2001).

> Many Heads of secondary schools in our country think that the classroom environment should be quiet and calm. Only teachers will talk, and all the students will listen to them. So, whatever activities I do, the class must be quiet and calm.

Shahed's statement reflects the monologue-based teaching approach to English teaching at the secondary level instead of teaching English communicatively. He argues that this situation continues due to the typical understanding of the head of the school of a classroom condition where students were supposed to be silent and only listen to the teacher. The head teacher's assumption for this type of classroom teaching might be one of the hindrances to conducting not only listening practice but also teaching English communicatively. His ironic use of the words "whatever activities I do, the class must be quiet and calm" suggests that quietness is in contradiction to the process of teaching and learning a language-based subject which is different from the teaching and learning of non-linguistic subjects based on subject topics. A language-based subject is considered a practice-based subject (Beacco, Fleming, Goullier, Thürmann, & Vollmer, 2015).

According to Beacco et al. (2015), "this approach to language as a subject is sometimes characterised as 'language in use' or 'immersion' because the key was that students actually used language in ways that had real meaning for them. It emerged from the growing focus on functions of language" (p. 67). However, it seems the headteacher assumed the teaching of English was a subject, such as Maths or Physics, for example. To teach these content-based subjects, classroom conditions require a less communicative process between a teacher and the learners. So, the headteacher, the product of the teacher-dominant classroom, thought the language teaching classroom condition similar to a subject-based classroom where a teacher was supposed to be the only speaker and the students would be the silent receivers of the taught contents. In the context of Bangladesh, the study of Podder (2011) also reported that when some secondary teachers wanted to practice and assess both listening and speaking in their classroom, they were pressurised by the headteacher not to practice these skills. The headteacher rather warned them of the need to finish the syllabus for the students and described the practice of listening and speaking as *worthless* as these skills were not necessary for the students to pass the examination. However, Goutum, the content and material developer, stated another epitome of the traditional mindset of the headteachers. He stated:

> We have a *Teachers' Curriculum Guide* for the teachers to apply the CLT approach to a classroom. So, NCTB decided to hand over the manual to the headteacher. But the problem is also here. After receiving the book, headteachers tell the peon to put it in *almirah* [cupboard] rather than giving it to the English teachers. Surprisingly, the headteacher is unaware of the importance of the manual. They even don't know that it should be taught in the classroom.

Goutum's phrases such as "put it in *almirah"* highlight the unawareness of headteachers of the fact that English teachers often did not receive the *Teachers' Curriculum Guide*. This book is a policy implementation manual for the teachers to follow the instructions given for their classroom teaching. The headteachers do not realise the importance of the *Teachers' Curriculum Guide* as a policy implementation manual for the teachers that described every pedagogical guideline projected in the curriculum. The headteachers even did not bother to distribute it to the teachers. If the headteacher went through the manual, he would know that the existing curriculum suggests a classroom where language practice should be focused on language proficiency. The *Teachers' Curriculum Guide* proposed the following statement related to this practice:

> So… you have to practice driving for a period of time under the guidance of a trainer before you go out driving on the street. And if you stop driving for any reason, your driving skills will get rusted. To practise language skills is exactly the same as practising driving skills. You can't do it in one go. The more constantly you practice the skills, the more effectively you can drive the car or use the language (Haque, Rashid, Motin, Jahan, & Rahman, 2017, p. xviii).

So, the unaware attitude of the headteachers promotes an approach to teaching English that is contrary to the communicative practice mandated by the curriculum. Goutum's statement also highlights the probability of culture between the headteacher and the general teachers that do not support engagement. If the teachers knew about this deprivation of not getting the *Teachers' Curriculum Guide,* they might develop a sense of distance from the headteacher. This tension might affect their teaching motivation and the overall teaching and learning culture of the school. One study, in the context of Bangladesh, also raised this issue. It stated that headteachers need to create space, openness, and motivation for teachers to share in school and to engage the community in promoting and supporting active learning in school (Hasnat, 2017; Rasheed, 2017). On the other hand, an earlier study (Salauddin & Conner,

2015) presented cases where headteachers worked as catalysts to make initiatives to transform a school. These headteachers enabled teachers to be more active to implement the essential focus of the curriculum. Another research by Alam (2016) reported that a headteacher took an initiative to improve collaborative work and practice in conjunction with the teachers and learners for better teaching and learning practice in the school.

Challenges of assessing listening comprehension

Apart from the challenges of teaching listening, there have been several issues related to its assessment procedures. Since the existing National Curriculum 2012 for English recommended all four skills of the English language to be assessed in school and public exams, it required the reformation of the existing examination system. In the curriculum, there is a suggestion to evaluate the speaking and listening abilities of students through a formative assessment throughout the year. The existing exam system relies only on reading and writing tasks. So, there will be a paradigm shift in learning and teaching oral English if these skills are included in both school and public exams. The question papers for the SSC examination are set by the relevant Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE), but teachers are responsible to set questions for school examinations. Although various attempts are underway to reform the current assessment procedure by including listening and speaking skills, nothing has come out in concreate so far. Several participants reported aspects of the ongoing attempts.

Resource restrictions and physical constraints to assess listening skill

A cohort of participants reported their opinions related to the challenges of assessing the listening skill in the existing context. There were multiple factors to this issue as stated by the participants. Two of the statements are as follow:

> Rahim: Most of the teachers are new to listening skill. They have fewer experiences of listening skill in English. We also lack sufficient teacher educators to train the teachers on how to conduct a listening assessment.

> Goutum: I must say that Bangladeshi teachers need to be prepared, trained, and skilled…it will be a huge test as you know that we have almost 1 million JSC and SSC examinees. We are still digging into the opportunities and planning on how to do the process. It is still in progress.

The statements of Rahim and Goutum, two of the content and material developers highlight two symbiotic tensions. Both of them emphasise that since the inception of listening skill in the curriculum, teachers had been insufficiently trained to practice listening in the classroom let alone assessing listening skill. Simultaneously, there is a paucity of teacher educators who could prepare secondary teachers to practice listening in the classroom. So, the teachers have no directives for evaluating the skills of listening. Thus, policymakers need to consider the impact of the number of teacher educators on the number of trained teachers. Until the shortage of teacher educators is addressed, the supply of trained trainers will not be enough to facilitate listening assessment.

Goutum further accentuates the issue of physical support for assessing listening in public examinations. Along with the scarcity of trained teachers, the restriction of physical support makes the assessment procedure a mammoth task. Goutum argued that the policymakers found it problematic to include a listening test for more than 1 million Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) and Secondary School Certificate (SSC) in English language assessment in a public examination. Although he was optimistic about assessing listening skills happen, it was still unclear how or in what format it would be included in a public examination. Hamid, one of the advisers of NCTB on secondary English textbooks, however, seemed sceptical about the inclusion of listening assessment in a public examination. Nonetheless, he proposed an option to ponder over the inclusion of the test of listening skill in a public examination. He said:

> The NCTB is thinking of testing listening and speaking skills in the school exams on a trial basis. After that, based on the outcomes, NCTB can introduce it in public exams like SSC. But thinking is going on. Still, a long way to go.

Hamid's use of the words 'trial basis' suggests a piloting procedure of assessing the listening comprehension skills in school exams before including them in a public examination. His suggestion denotes that the terminal exams of schools could conduct a classroom-based assessment to check students' listening competence. So, it seems that classroom assessment could be one of the options to not only assess students' progress but also improve their listening competence. Various research findings also stated that formative assessment could be a valid and reliable source of grading students' learning and linked to summative assessment for a better evaluation of the quality of education (Ahsan, 2018). However, this

proposal raises a few tensions. Anam, one of the urban teachers, reported that a few teachers informally and personally evaluated listening skill. He stated:

> Although a few teachers evaluated listening and speaking skills informally, they required the decision of the higher authority to add the marking into the formal school assessment of English papers. They had to seek favourable attitude from the school headteacher to allot marks for listening and speaking assessments.

Anam's opinion raises the problem regarding classroom assessment and its marking of listening skills. His words "required the decision of higher authority" indicate that teachers are not independent to include the marks of listening assessment with the rest of the allotted marks for the English papers taught at different classes of secondary level. It is the headteacher who can decide whether the marks would be added or not to the total grading of the paper concerned. This is completely a contradiction to the *Teachers' Curriculum Guide*. In the *Teachers' Curriculum Guide*, it is stated that English teachers would be liable to practice, design, conduct, and grade the performance of the listening skill (Haque et al., 2017). The international literature also emphasises classroom-based continuous assessment by the teachers (Nusche, Halasz, Looney, Santiago, & Shewbridge, 2011). However, the headteacher may block the process because of his lack of confidence in teachers. He might think that since the assessment of listening and speaking in Bangladesh is new, the teachers would not be able to assess the skills properly. So, the marks of the listening and speaking assessments would not be valid to consider. This situation also leads to the issue of demotivation of teachers to practice and grade assessment of students' listening. A study also argued that if the teachers were dissatisfied with their perceived lack of autonomy, they become affected by their motivation and commitment to classroom teaching (Paradis, Lutovac, Jokikokko, & Kaasila, 2018). The issue of fairness in assessment by teachers also looms as a concern that will be discussed in the following section. However, research regarding Bangladesh demonstrated that there were headteachers who properly distributed responsibilities and functional areas to the teachers according to their talent and expertise (Salauddin & Conner, 2015).

Heavy focus on examination

A number of participants identified the issue of a heavy focus on examination that excludes listening practice in a classroom. The participants emphasised that the influence of exams-

oriented teaching and assessment procedure directs the extent to which listening activities are practised. The following statements by the participants depict opinions on this issue:

> Mahbub (Urban teacher): Listening skill can be evaluated in the classroom. In addition, a public examination should also assess listening skill. In paper one labelled as EfT (English for Today), the examination should allow 10 marks proposed by the curriculum for the final assessment of listening skill.
>
> Shahed (Urban Teacher): Listening skill should be part of secondary public examination. It will then motivate students to practice more to develop communicative competence. Besides, if they can practice oral skills at school, these skills will not be unfamiliar to them in an IELTS test.
>
> Nurul (Urban teacher): Listening skill should be assessed in the classroom. Besides, public examinations should also include listening skill in their English language assessment. The inclusion of listening skill for both types of assessment will motivate the students to practice them.
>
> Anam (Urban teacher): Listening is not in the exam. Students practice listening for practice's sake, not for the improvement of English proficiency.

Mahbub's statement highlights the need for the evaluation of listening skill both in the classroom and in the public examination. His statement also indicates that he is well aware of the curriculum for English education and the distribution of marks to assess listening skills. Shahed's statement supports Mahbub's statement. Shahed further accentuated the need for listening evaluation not only to motivate students for the practice but also to improve their communicative competence. It is evident from his words that to make any qualitative change in classroom teaching and learning, the current examination system should be reformed following the national curriculum to achieve its goals.

In the current context, I argue that it is not always fitting to blame teachers' lacklustre attitude toward exam-oriented teaching. There is an issue of non-alignment between the curriculum and the exam system that forces the teachers to be exam-focused. Shahed's statement also indicates that there is a negative influence on classroom practice due to the absence of listening assessment. So, there is a need for changes in the examination format. The examination needs to follow the curriculum to facilitate teachers to teach students focusing on language learning rather than preparing them to jump the hurdles of exams. A recent study

(Chowdhury, 2019) also posited that excessive focus on exams helps students pass the exam but does not help them achieve their level of English language competence. After studying the English language for 12 years, only 25% of the students achieve the expected level of English language competence. Shahed also prophesied that the inclusion of oral skills for the school and public exams could make the students confident if they took the IELTS test after their higher secondary education.

Nurul's statement indicates that the existing assessment system that dictates classroom practices excluding listening skill. So, students' learning of language is affected by the existing assessment system. The existing assessment without listening skill might encourage students to focus only on the writing assessment of their learning instead of the practice of aural-oral proficiency in the English language. Moreover, this situation would not help students to tune their critical knowledge to apply in learning English. The National Education Policy (2010) targeted "the development of thinking" (p.62) of the learners. Anam's statement further points to the tension where the influence of the assessment is different from the classroom. His words "practice listening for practice's sake" highlight that listening practice can become a part of a routine activity to make the class look like a communicative one, but not be one in a real sense. So, the main purpose of the listening practice is side-lined as a negative impact of *washback* on listening assessment both for classroom and public exams. Therefore, the existing SSC examination format encourages rote learning and memorisation rather than developing students' listening comprehension skills for language proficiency as the students and teachers prioritised the score of the SSC examination over English proficiency, which was contrary to the original goal in the secondary English curriculum.

In the policy of the English language curriculum and textbooks of English for SSC, the focus is on the practice of all four skills. However, as oral skills, listening and speaking, are not taught or assessed, neither teachers nor students pay attention to the development of these two skills (Ali, 2014a). In Bangladesh, students for public exams are assessed for only reading and writing and that covers only 50% of students' language performance skills. The rest of 50% of language performance skills are not either assessed or taught and thereby it is evident that the English language assessment of SSC was seriously faulty (Shurovi, 2014). The research argued that most of the teachers for English papers suffer from the impact of *washback* as they teach only those sections of the textbooks that are related to exams and follow the patterns of previous years' exam questions (Rahman, 2014). As a result, in the

context of English language teaching and learning, *washback* has a negative impact as it hampers the teaching strategies and learning outcomes by narrowing down the focus of teaching and learning of English to a selected section of the textbooks of the syllabus. In Bangladesh, classroom teaching is more test-focused; most of the teachers do not have assessment knowledge. The teachers lack language assessment literacy (LAL) and language assessment skills, although the knowledge of assessment might increase the quality of classroom instruction (Sultana, 2019). So, the research about teachers' training should also focus on exploring ways of improving the assessment skills of the teachers, and so inform training that can help in developing the assessment literacy of language teachers. Moreover, to achieve UN sustainable goals, training on teacher development for teaching oral skills for English proficiency is needed (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018).

Probability of unfairness in assessing listening skill

The following statements by participants showed opinions about the probability of unfairness if the listening skill is assessed internally and its marks included in SSC public examination. There were opinions from both policymakers and teachers. The Head of the Curriculum said:

> The practical test of science education is done at schools, and the grade of students are also done at schools. Education boards that conduct theoretical exams only grade for the theoretical part. Unfortunately, the process of grading and assessing the practical test of science education has become a farce in our system. Yes, the possibility is there for a listening test as well. This anxiety is in us, and this will be a great challenge for us. This is why we would like to see how the teachers are doing in the school-based assessment. If the report is impressive and properly done then we will think of introducing it in public tests.

The Head of the Curriculum articulates the probability of possible unfairness due to his previous experience related to the practical component of science education in Bangladesh. His negative experience of unfairness in marking and assessing the practical test of science education put him in a dilemma about whether to include the assessment procedure of listening skill in the secondary public examination. This tension might be one of the reasons why listening and speaking have not been assessed in public examination since their inclusion in the National Curriculum for English 2012. Different subjects of science education allocate 25 marks for lab-based practice assessments for each subject. The head of the curriculum, by his words: “become a farce”, informs that the grading and assessment of

practical science exams were not fair and became a farce. It was either because the students were assessed in a biased way or improperly so that no student could get the grade according to their level of performance. It might also be the case that, as the assessment was subjective, there was a chance that teachers could abuse it. It could also raise the issue of corruption by promoting the existing coaching culture of the country. The students might start taking private tuition on listening tests in a similar fashion they are taking private tuition for practical science tests. According to him, this experience put the policymakers on hold because the same situation might emerge from the inclusion of the listening test in the SSC examination. This notion made them decide to observe the ongoing informal marking by the teachers at schools. So, the decision is pending about when and how the listening will be assessed to include it in a public examination. Different research studies highlight that private tuition, which is called shadow education in many countries, has made the entire education system of Bangladesh dependent on it (Hossen, 2019). Recent research also reports that there are no practical classes for science subjects throughout the year. However, most often, teachers just conduct summative assessments before the SSC examination, as many schools do not have proper science laboratories with sufficient experimental materials to assess students properly. So, almost every student is awarded full marks for the practical test. It was also reported that some teachers abused this subjective award of marking the students if they were not happy with them (Al Amin, 2017). However, despite the reasons for probable unfairness in listening assessment, it seems that the Head of the Curriculum is trying to avoid the assessment of listening in the name of the issue of unfairness rather than fix the issue of the unfairness of lab-based assessments of science education. Alternatively, the policymakers could think of a way to assess listening, which might not be similar to the context of lab-based science education for its assessment procedure.

Rahim, a content and material developer of NCTB, and Rashid, an advisor of NCTB for secondary English textbooks, also supported the bitter experience of the Head of the Curriculum regarding the assessment and inclusion of lab-based practical marks for science subjects in public exams. Therefore, they also agreed with the Head of the Curriculum to observe the ongoing situation, and whether listening practice and its assessment were going on in secondary schools. However, both of them proposed some possible plans and actions to assess and include listening in a public examination. They stated:

Rahim: We will not go for a one-time deal to assess listening skill. We will monitor the progress of listening through formative assessment. We will go for multiple assessments at schools and tabulate a mean score for each student. If we can do that, the distribution of marks for listening tests will be more acceptable to every student. Teachers will be less able to show a bias towards marking. I think within the next two years, teaching and assessment of listening and speaking skills will be in full function at our secondary level.

Rashid: The issue is related to the fairness of the assessment. We need to supervise whether the teachers properly assess listening and speaking in their school. If the teachers do not assess these skills correctly based on classroom performance to be added to public exams, good students will suffer. There is a chance to be overrated or underrated in the assessment of oral skills. The skilled teachers may assess differently than the less skilled teachers in terms of assessment. For example, there are more skilled teachers in urban schools than in rural schools. A skilled teacher may provide 15 marks to a student for the same listening exercises in oral skills. Another less skilled teacher in a rural school may give 18 marks to a student for the same listening exercises in oral skills. So, there is a chance of over-rating a less proficient student. The difference of 3 marks may also make a difference to the student's overall grading for the English paper.

Both Rahim and Rashid highlight the need for supervision on the part of the policymakers to ensure the fairness of marking for listening and speaking skills. Rahim suggests a formative assessment of listening by the teachers at schools. The grading of listening could be done by calculating the mean score to minimise the probability of bias. However, according to his statement, the supervision by the policymakers has not been started yet. This situation underlines the incoherence between the adopted policy and the actual practice. It again accentuated the limitations of the policymakers for not considering the ground before planning the introduction of listening skill as they followed a top-down policy scheme rather than checking what is possible at ground level and how change should be staged. The policymakers did not tailor their planning to suit the ground reality. They did not even consider how to engage teachers in the process of planning, whereas, the teachers are the main agents to implement the assessment of listening skill.

Different research also acknowledged that teachers, the classroom practitioners, are at the heart of language policy and the findings urged for a proper balance between the top-level policies and the bottom-level players (Koksal & Sahin, 2012; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). So, any curriculum implementation without considering the baseline enablers lacks clarity and creates complexity. The discrepancy that arose between the macro-level policy and micro-level implementation could be one of the reasons for the absence of the assessment of listening so far since its inclusion in the curriculum in 2012.

Rashid further discusses an issue that questions the assurance of fairness in assessing listening. He highlighted that there is a high chance of unfairness due to the variance of the teachers in terms of their ability to mark listening tasks. Rashid's tension is about the probability that "overrating" of the less efficient students might affect the real rating of the performance of the proficient students in a high-stakes examination such as SSC. This examination has social and academic consequences for students' lives and careers. The existing research also suggests that more than 50% of secondary teachers do not know how to set a relevant question paper ("Secondary education in Bangladesh: Over 50% of secondary teachers can't prepare question papers," 2019). There are currently 358,907 teachers in 29,330 secondary schools across the country for total students of 12,197,554 from all the major streams- Bangla-medium, Vocational, and Madrasas. Various research studies report that although there have been a number of in-service teacher training programmes, the outcomes are not significant. Either many of the teachers did not receive the required training on English language teaching and assessment or they remained unchanged after having the training for different reasons (Karim & Mohamed, 2019; Karim, Mohamed, Ismail, & Rahman, 2018). So, it seems probable that all the teachers might not assess listening skill on an equal footing.

Shanza, an urban teacher, highlighted a weird type of unfairness regarding the assessment of both listening and speaking skills. She stated:

> Teachers who teach listening and speaking should mark for these two skills. But we see that teachers do not mark for the listening and speaking assessments. The headteachers mark these skills based on the mean score of the students' written performance. So, the regular assessment of the skills doesn't have importance to the students.

Shahnaz's statement indicates that teachers teach oral skills and assess the students' in-class activities based on their performance. However, they are not allowed to grade them for oral skills in the terminal examination, where the marks should be added to the remaining 80% of the written marks of the English paper. Shahnaz's use of the words "based on the mean score" indicates that the students actually are not given 20% of the total marks from the assessment of their communicative performance; rather their achievement in the written component determines what they will be given for oral competency. By implication, students are encouraged to perform well in the traditional written examination to secure marks rather than improving their communicative language competence for their real life. This tension not only affects the motivation of the teachers but also the students to practice and perform the tasks of listening in a classroom. Students also know that the performance of oral skills will not affect their grading for English papers in terminal or school exams. This situation also refers back to the issue of washback that I discussed in the previous section. So, the actual goals of both the Education Policy 2010 and the National Curriculum for English 2012 related to making students communicatively competent for a global world are hindered. Shahnaz's comment also reaffirms the need for a positive leadership role to be played by headteachers. In such ways, the policymakers, headteachers, and teachers in the current study described multiple tensions concerning the areas of teaching and assessing listening skill at the secondary level.

Discussion on emergent themes of this chapter

The participants in this study raised a range of issues regarding the challenges of teaching and assessment of listening skills at the secondary level. They also argued that the teaching challenges of listening skills are created because of problems related to technical resourcing, training, resource restrictions, lack of motivation by teachers, and non-cooperative attitudes of headteachers. The urgency of pre-service and in-service training in oral skills was highlighted.

The participants commented on the current practices and perceptions of listening skill in English language teaching in secondary schools in Bangladesh. They reported that even the teachers who teach listening, apply a product-based approach to the teaching of listening as they only practice listening tasks in a piecemeal fashion. Some participants argued that teachers do not know how to facilitate process-based listening practices in the classroom. Many of the teachers thought of a lesson plan that was just the list of topics or subtopics that

they would teach in the classes for the teaching of listening. So, they just practised the exercises on the listening topics in the classroom. There was no process-based approach to the teaching of listening as no participants reported that they taught cognitive or meta-language processing strategies to the students to comprehend listening texts.

The discussion of assessment challenges is more tentative and hypothetical as the listening skill is not yet part of the formal assessment system of the English language both in schools and public exams. The participants reported that most of the time listening skills were neither taught nor assessed systematically as part of the process of English language proficiency to comply with the curriculum. So, without the teaching of listening for English language proficiency, it would not be accepted to test those skills in the SSC examination. Both the participants and the existing research findings highlighted that few research studies have focused on the teaching and assessment of listening skills in secondary English education.

Integrating technological knowledge in a teaching-learning process is still a complex issue in teaching English in the secondary classroom. The participants also reported that they faced different technical issues when they practised listening. The technical issues were related to internet access and its availability, uninterrupted power supply to have access to online materials, download those materials, and use multimedia without power cut. The government claimed that it equipped at least one classroom in each school to teach English audio-visually. However, research showed that 41% of secondary schools have no multimedia classrooms or ICT labs (Babu & Nath, 2017).

From the participants' statements, it appears that teachers' lack of ICT knowledge and their technophobia are perennial problems for the practice of English listening content in Bangladeshi secondary classrooms. The dearth of trained English language teachers is not a new tale. It has been an ongoing problem since the independence of Bangladesh. There is also a shortage of teacher educators who could train the teachers through various training projects. Although several government-initiated and donor-funded projects are functioning for the training of teachers, there is no specific training provided to the teachers on teaching listening and speaking skills. However, hands-on in-service training is needed to improve teachers' oral skills before they teach oral skills to the students.

The participants further reported that teachers used multimedia classrooms to visualise and play listening tasks but could not connect the students to the active participation of the tasks

through collaborative learning tasks, such as group or pair work due to time constraints and their lack of knowledge on how the TPACK operates. It is because, along with the knowledge of new technology for the teachers, it is the pedagogy that should be the driving force behind teachers' use of technology in a classroom. Research studies also argued that the use of technology for its own sake could not add anything to either the teaching or the learning. It could be an improvement if it moved hand-in-hand with a change in the pedagogy (Williams, 2014, May 12). Therefore, because of the lack of proper knowledge of TPACK, teachers were not able to create more communicative situations using ICT aids in the classrooms.

The TPACK knowledge has not been provided so far through any of the donor-funded projects, without which no technical knowledge could be transformed into a classroom for the English teaching-learning process. Some of the research found that teachers still struggled in using these materials properly. Babu and Nath (2017) posited that teachers could not engage learners in activities as suggested in the materials. They often struggled to operate those materials confidently, especially in group activities. They failed to trigger the required level of interactive sessions among the learners, which ultimately hindered the proper teaching-learning process. Although sometimes the teachers activate listening practice in a classroom, they just drilled it, as they had no sufficient knowledge of TPACK to apply in teaching to improve language proficiency through listening practice. It seemed that the dearth of relevant research on teachers' training and TPACK knowledge in the context of teaching secondary English warrants further research studies on this issue. So, if the teachers were not well-trained they would not be able to use the full potential of these technologies in their classroom and would merely use them for presentation and demonstration (Sultana & Haque, 2018).

Besides, the progress in supplying training is slow. Out of 358,907 secondary teachers, only about 12,000 teachers from secondary and higher secondary teachers received training on how to develop digital content for classroom lessons to teach and use the internet (Asian Development Bank, 2017). So, the number of ICT-trained English teachers among all other teachers is palpably less than the needed number. Moreover, only 5% of the total population uses the internet, and the cost of the internet in the country is the second-highest in South Asia (Asian Development Bank, 2017). Therefore, the aspiration of the government to fulfil the *Vision 2021* project using the knowledge of English as a tool for development (Ministry of Education, 2010) will be hindered if these technological supports are not used fully in classroom teaching.

Secondary English education also has to overcome challenges from two fronts if it wants a successful integration of teaching with technology in a classroom. First, there should be training programmes that could produce a sufficient number of techno-savvy teachers with TPACK knowledge. Second, there is a problem for uninterrupted power supply to occur in rural schools to use ICT in the classrooms. If power outages repeatedly disrupt audio-visual English language classes, the practice of listening for language proficiency will be disturbed.

Another major problem found by the participants was that most of the teachers could not follow the teachers 'curriculum guide for their classroom teaching. It happened because the headteachers often did not supply this guide to the teachers. The headteachers were traditional and seemed unaware of the goals of the ongoing curriculum for secondary English education. A headteacher is the key person to play the role of leadership and is supposed to map out how the relevant policies related to English language education could be implemented. The headteachers must use their management skills to guide the teachers in the right direction so that teachers are motivated to practice the guidelines of the curriculum in the classroom teaching smoothly and efficiently. The perceived gap between the teachers and the headteacher creates one of the hindrances to align the goals of the curriculum and its training to classroom teaching.

The participants also reported that the secondary school examination (SSC) did not include listening skill in the assessment and grading for the probable reasons of practicality and fear of unfairness. The policymakers also reported that the monitoring phase to look after the implementation process was very ineffective. Due to the lack of a monitoring phase, the issues that prevent listening skill from being part of both classroom practices and assessment procedures have not been investigated since the curriculum for English 2012 included listening. The teaching and assessment of listening have been determined by the negative influence of the examination, known as *washback* impact. However, the main aim of the listening practice and assessment mandated by the curriculum is to improve English language proficiency.

The participants who were policymakers were concerned about the unfairness issue of listening assessment if it would be part of the public examination. The curriculum includes oral skills for the assessment in the public examination in 2012. However, the policymakers surprisingly excluded oral skills to be part of public examination. The policymakers were

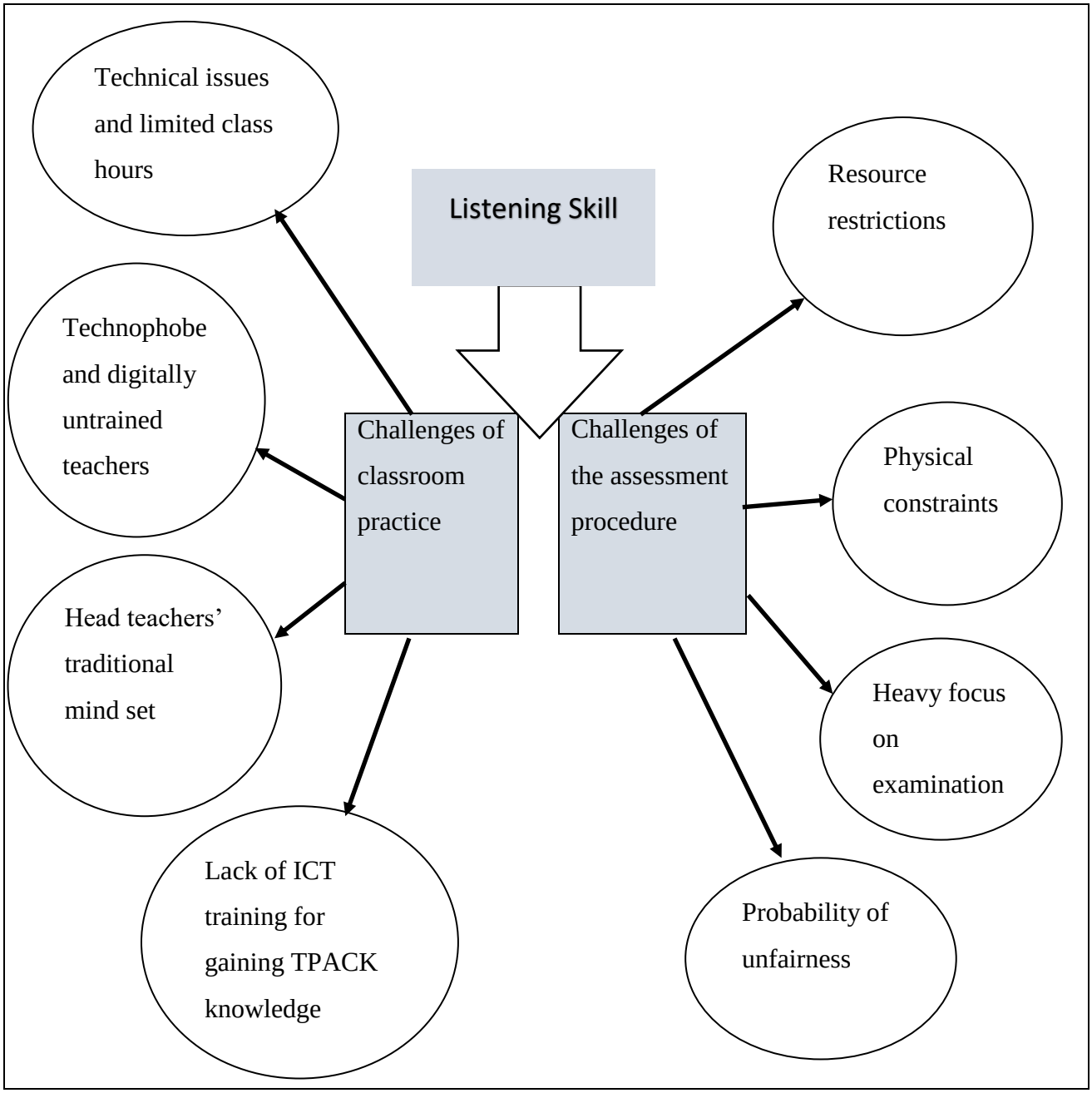

Figure 4. Challenges of listening practice in classroom and assessment procedure

sceptical about introducing listening assessment in the public examination. They had previous experience of unfairness regarding the assessment of lab-based practical examination of science education. This indicates that policymakers also predict the probability of unfairness in the assessment of listening comprehension.

Some of the participants even reported that they were unsure about how to include the testing of listening skills in the SSC examination. Figure 4 represents the problems that have emerged from this chapter.

Chapter Seven: Listening Comprehension: The IELTS Experience

The overall rationale behind Chapter Seven is to make a relationship between the IELTS listening test and the listening practice of secondary students to understand their potential listening comprehension difficulties. This chapter reports that secondary students do not face a test of listening comprehension until they attempt to sit for the IELTS test after their higher secondary education. They only prepare themselves to score for the IELTS listening test. Therefore, they practice and prepare themselves only for the test but not for improving listening as a skill for their language proficiency. In Chapter Six, several participants informed that listening skills are rarely taught in secondary classrooms and are not tested in both the mainstream secondary and higher secondary public exams. Secondary and higher secondary students do not have the opportunity to overcome their listening comprehension difficulties in school and the teachers also do not have the required pedagogical skills to teach listening in schools. Therefore, it can be useful to examine the process of the teaching and practising of listening in the IELTS preparatory course to look into the overall teaching, learning, and assessment of listening skill that can be linked to the secondary school classroom. So, this chapter examines the listening difficulties of IELTS preparatory students from both trainers' and learners' perspectives.

Introduction

This chapter describes and discusses a number of issues related to the listening difficulties of preparatory IELTS students in Bangladesh and the challenges of teaching them listening skills. Anyone who wishes to prepare for the IELTS test should have at least higher secondary education. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has included listening comprehension in a similar fashion to the IELTS listening task format in compulsory English textbooks for English language education since 2015 to improve English language proficiency for the learners of secondary levels. The material reported in this chapter comes from statistical surveys of the IELTS preparatory students, and interviews with trainers and high-performer Bangladeshi IELTS test-takers. As explained in Chapter Two, both the National Education Policy (NEP) 2010 and the National Curriculum for English

2012 reinforced English language learning for the realities of employment, global competitiveness, and higher education abroad.

IELTS listening test

The IELTS Listening module is the least researched of the IELTS test modules (Phakiti, 2016). However, because it is a high-stake test, the IELTS test has given listening skill prominence. The approximate time of the IELTS listening test is 30 minutes and the examinees get additional 10 minutes to transfer their answers from the answer script to the answer sheet. The candidates for IELTS for both Academic and General Training take the same type of listening test. There are four separate sections of the listening test comprising 40 questions. One mark is allocated to each correct answer in the 40-item test. Band scores, bracketing from Band 1 to Band 9, are allocated for test-takers based on their performance score (Appendix K). Out of these four sections, the first two sections are set in a social context and the latter two sections are set in an academic context. Test-takers will hear the text only once (Cullen et al., 2014).

Description of the IELTS preparatory students

It was possible to survey a sizeable group (N=122) of IELTS preparatory students before and after their preparatory course. All of them were homogenous. Initially, I approached 210 IELTS preparatory students but ended up with 122 students who completed both the pre-and post-questionnaires of the preparatory course. As explained in Chapter Four, it is suggested that this group provides a useful indication of attitudes and perceptions of the students about listening skill. The purpose of the demographic description in the questionnaire was to collect background information related to students' educational and socio-economic levels, self-activities at their personal level to improve their English proficiency level and the year they began to learn English. The questionnaire had nine items on the demography of the participants and was administered at the beginning of the IELTS preparatory course. The group was comprised of graduates of Bangla-medium secondary schools. The following Table 6 summarises the demographic features of the participants in the surveys:

Table 6. *Demographic summary of the participants*

Education	Percentage	Economic Status	Percentage	Living Area	Percentage
Higher Secondary	48%	Rich	2%	Urban	96%
Undergraduate	2%	Upper-middle class	1%	Suburban	4%
Postgraduate	6%	Middle class	83%	Rural	None
Other (Diplomas and Certificates)	44%	Underprivileged	14%		

All of the participants were preparing for the IELTS test. They started learning English in Grade 1. The education level of all of them was at least higher secondary and most of them belonged to the Middle economy group living in an urban area. When asked, they explained the reasons for taking the IELTS test. This is shown in figure 5 below:

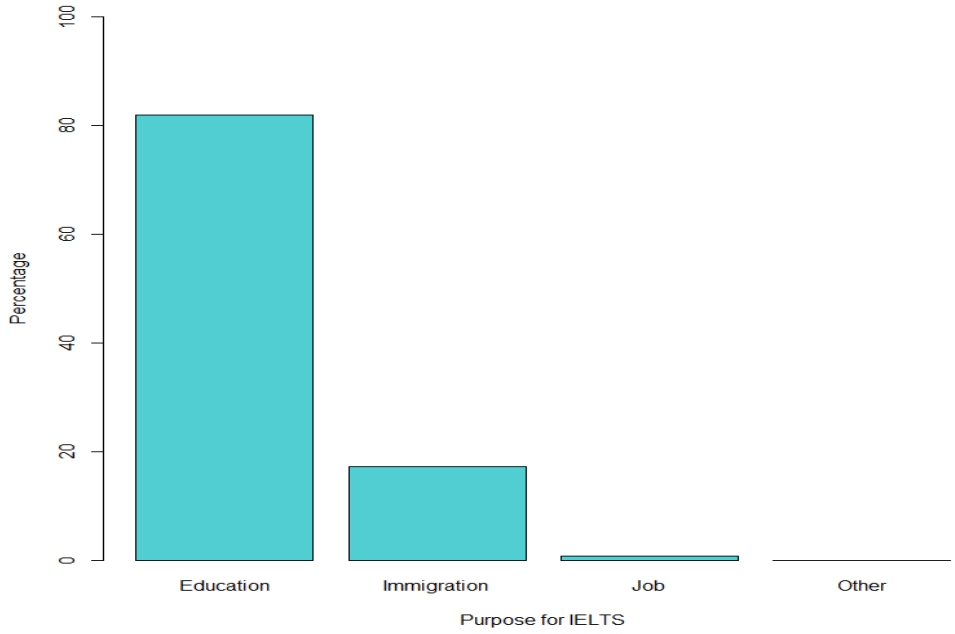

Figure 5. The purpose of taking the IELTS test

Among the participants, 80% of them considered the IELTS test as a means to get an entry for higher education abroad or at home and a further 18% of them took it in hope of going to live in an English-speaking country. Only 2% of them were preparing for the IELTS test to get a job. Participants were surveyed before and after they took the preparatory course and asked which of the four language modes was most important as well as most difficult.

Figure 6 shows the response of the participants. They identified listening as the most important skill for English language proficiency. The first column in each option represents their opinion before they took the preparatory course. The second column in each option represents their opinion after they took the preparatory course.

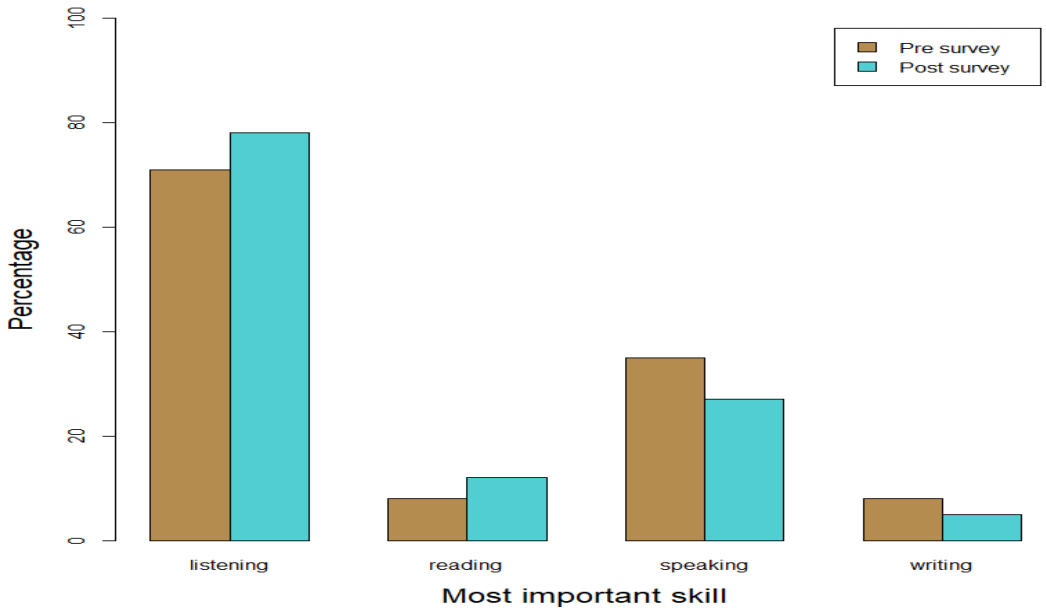

Figure 6. The participants identified *listening* as the most important skill

Figure 7 shows which particular language skill participants considered most difficult. The first column in each case represents their option before they took the preparatory course. The second represents their option after they took the preparatory course.

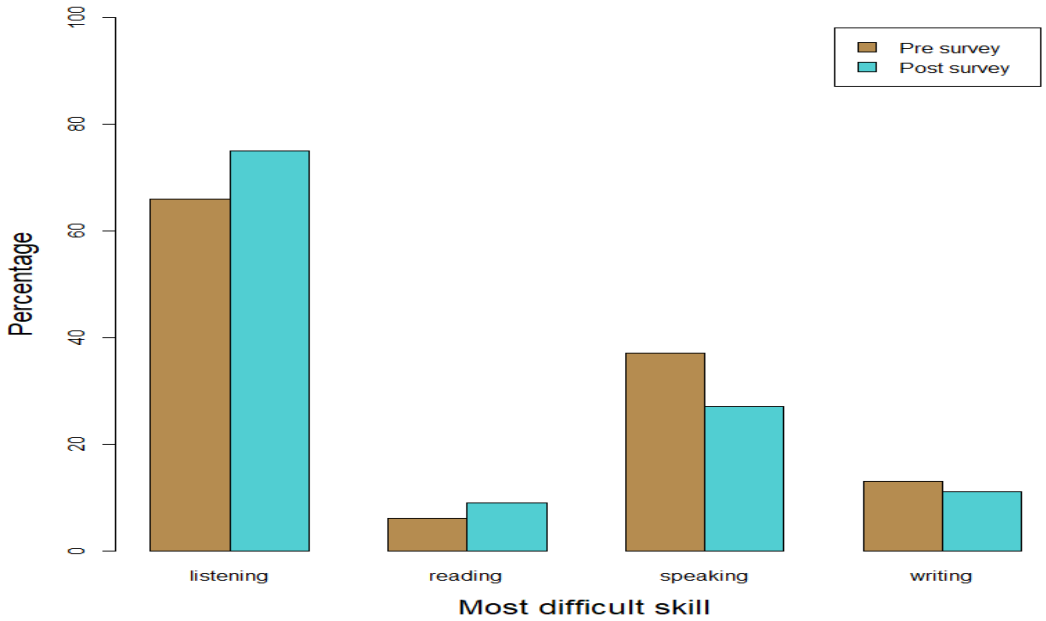

Figure 7. The participants identified *listening* as the most difficult skill

Over half of the participants (75%) thought *listening skill* was most important before the survey of the preparatory course, and after the preparatory course, the percentage increased

by 3%. Similarly, the participants also thought that listening was the most difficult skill (65%) for them, and in fact, it increased significantly by 10% after the preparatory course. Possibly, after the preparatory course, they became more aware of their listening difficulties, and perhaps, they also became aware of their lack of skills for listening comprehension. A possible meaningful interpretation is that although they found listening difficult, they still believed it the most important skill for them to develop for their English proficiency. The other possible notion of why they perceived listening as the most important skill although they found it most difficult, might be that they had the least preparation for listening skill out of all four skills since they came for the preparatory course. Ashek, one of the IELTS trainers, reported one of the reasons for the participants for their difficulty in the preparatory course. He stated:

> In our preparatory course, I find that students from Bangla-medium are familiar with reading and writing skills, but they are not familiar with listening and speaking skills. They are weak in listening and speaking skills because they were not tested for these two skills at their secondary and higher secondary levels.

Ashek's statement highlights that unfamiliarity with oral skills might be one of the reasons to be weak listening and speaking skills. It is argued that listening skills precede speaking skills and improvement in listening leads to improvement in speaking as well as overall language proficiency (Richards, 2015).

Personal preparation of the IELTS preparatory students

Participants were asked to indicate their individual sources from a choice (Appendices F & G) for improving the English language, in addition to their academic learning. The most commonly ticked were movies or news, listening to English music, speaking in English with friends and family members, reading books/novels, and others, if anything apart from these choices.

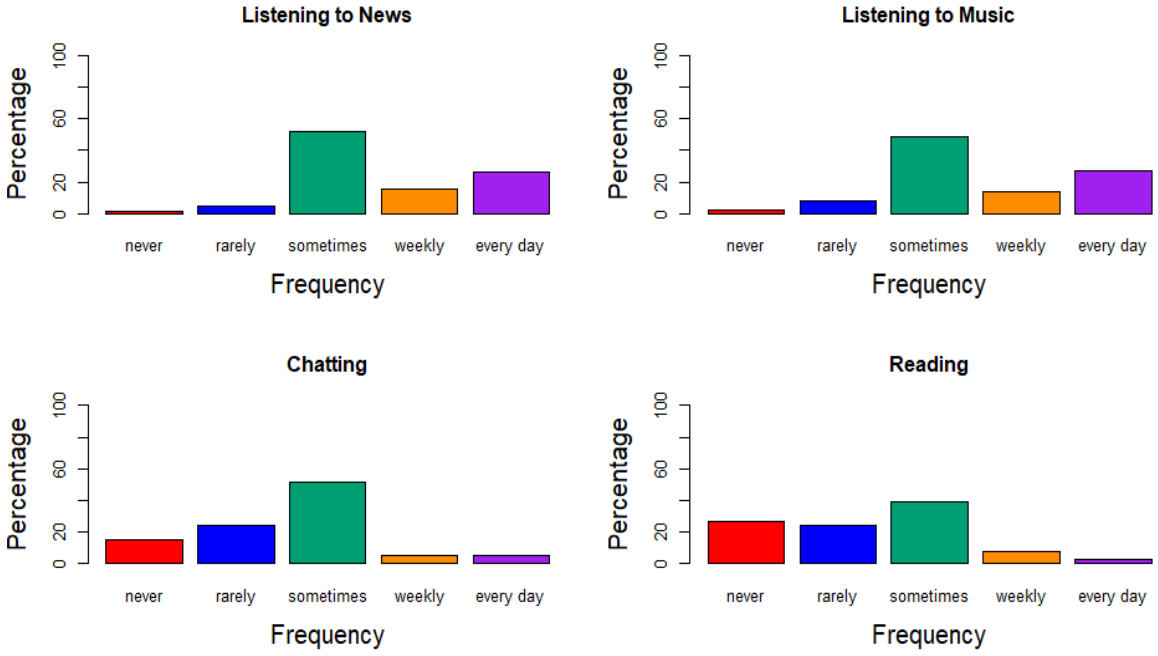

Figure 8. Students' personal preferences to improve their English in the pre-course survey

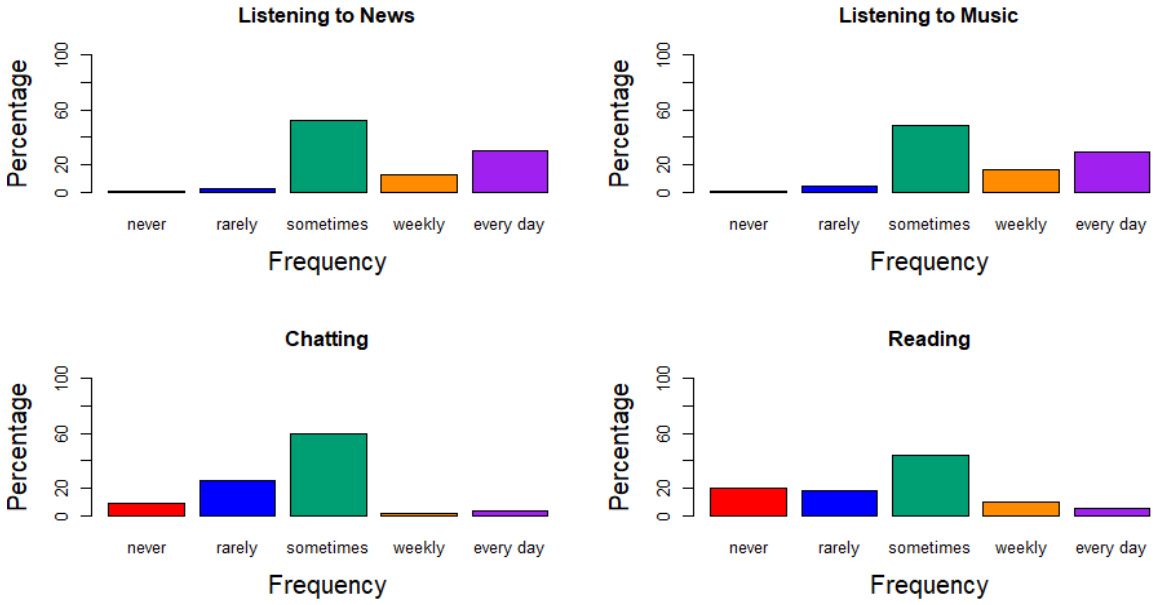

Figure 9. Students' personal preferences to improve their English in the post-course survey

Figures 8 and 9 show the range of participants' personal choices of means to improve their listening comprehension, before and after the preparatory course. Participants used various platforms for listening practices according to their individual learning preferences. In both pre and post-surveys, most of the participants preferred oral forms of practice rather than reading as the medium of their English language improvement. It might indicate that the participants were more concerned about improving their listening and speaking skills for the

IELTS test. The other argument could be that different ESL learners might have different learning styles (Reid, 1987) although the debate is going on whether learning styles exist or not. Husmann and O'Loughlin (2019) questioned the conventional wisdom about learning styles assumed by educators and learners.

Perhaps some of the means chosen by these participants are also available in secondary schools. The teachers at secondary schools could consider the IELTS model of listening practice as one of the feasible ways of practising the listening tasks in the *English for Today* textbooks in the secondary classrooms. Furthermore, in the text boxes of both pre-preparatory and post-preparatory course surveys, the participants also commented on how they took advantage of their own preference to improve the English language. The usage of YouTube for listening to songs and watching tutorial videos on the English language was mentioned repeatedly by participants. Some of the participants used YouTube to watch different short tutorial videos on the English language to improve their overall language proficiency. One of the participants stated:

> I use YouTube to watch short tutorial videos on improving the English language. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 134).

However, a group of survey participants reported that they watch English movies or English news with subtitles to improve their English proficiency. A large number of them used YouTube as a channel. One of the participants wrote:

> I think, in the age of the internet, YouTube is a good medium to improve the English language. Therefore, I watch English movies and English news with subtitles to improve my English language. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 68).

In this regard, Tiplu, one of the experienced IELTS trainers, suggested differently about watching English movies with subtitles to improve IELTS listening proficiency. He said:

> I think watching English movies with subtitles does not help much as many trainers think. It is because the accent and speed of the IELTS listening test are not similar to the dialogues in English movies.

A group of participants reported that they used YouTube to listen to English songs with subtitles perceiving that speedy lyrics of English songs might help them understand monologues in IELTS listening. One of them stated:

> Listening to English songs on YouTube with subtitles helped me understand English better. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 33).

In this regard, Ishmam, one of the top-scoring and experienced IELTS test-takers, emphasises the value of listening to music:

> Listening to the song really helped me to improve my listening proficiency in English. In our country, most people enjoy the rhythm and music of the song only. They do not focus on the lyrics for pronunciation and word meaning. So, I went one step ahead. I focused on these aspects when I listened to a song. So, I downloaded and printed the lyrics of the song from the internet before I listened to the song. After that, I listened and followed the lyrics simultaneously. I tried to understand word by word for pronunciation and meaning. This habit helped me in two ways. I enjoyed the song; at the same time, my listening was also improved. Later, I prepared myself for the IELTS test. In comparison to the lyrics, the speed of IELTS listening seemed to be slow and easy to comprehend.

Khokon, one of the IELTS trainers, stated something interesting about YouTube. Many of his IELTS preparatory students depended on YouTube for watching tutorial videos along with the preparatory course. He said:

> On YouTube, tutorial videos related to IELTS test preparation attract young preparatory students. Many of them watch those videos more than I do. YouTube is something exciting to them. They listen to the experiences of top-scoring IELTS test-takers around the world. That really motivates them to prepare well.

Being an IELTS trainer, Saif also supported Khokon's statement regarding YouTube as a source of effective means for the preparatory students to prepare for their IELTS test.

> Nowadays, YouTube is the best source for getting experts' comments and suggestions on the IELTS test preparation. High band achievers of IELTS share their suggestions and experience on YouTube for the probable IELTS test-takers.

However, Ashek, another IELTS trainer, finds himself in a challenging situation as a trainer due to the availability of IELTS preparatory materials and videos on the internet. He uttered:

> I do not think that anyone, as a teacher or trainer, faced the challenge of preparing students in the pre-internet era. However, the internet is a threat to us. For example,

> any student who wishes to prepare for IELTS can listen to any tutorial on the internet. For example, they can listen to YouTube for lecture tutorials. What we teach the students, they can get all the materials and references from the internet. So, IELTS trainers face a tough challenge in preparing the students. In the age of the internet, with a free flow of information, I think a trainer can survive in providing training if they can tailor the preparatory content for the students from their long-time experience. Students cannot do that as they are not as experienced as we are and it may take a much longer time for them.

Ashek's statement reports an ongoing tension in the IELTS trainers. They are worried about the future of the preparatory course. His statement indicates that due to the availability of online materials on the internet, IELTS preparation is becoming ubiquitously available and students can prepare them out-of-classroom. The trainers are also preparing for a generation called *Z* who are techno-savvy and prefer student-centred learning. Ashek's statement further denotes that trainers can minimise their challenges by changing their position from the sole provider of the IELTS training preparation to a facilitator. This requires the trainer to shift him or herself from the front to the centre to become more of a guide on the side rather than a sage on the stage. By doing so, the trainers can prepare the students by providing tailored materials in combination with their own long-time experiences. However, recent research avers that there is a continuous debate on the role of the teachers, whether the idea of a teacher being a *sage on the stage* is over and the teachers should play the role of a facilitator, or whether a teacher should play an active role in the learning process (Bothwell, 2018; Goodyear & Dudley, 2015).

Himel, an IELTS trainer, further acknowledged that learning podcasts on the internet helped students improve their IELTS listening skill. He said:

> Access to technology is definitely helpful for the students to improve their listening proficiency. For example, I told my students to listen to podcasts like the *BBC 6 Minute English*. They told me that they benefited from listening to these podcasts. Besides, students can learn outside the course as well for technological advancement. They can have access to the internet for any listening materials whenever they like. Technology gave them freedom of time, space, and scope of learning English.

A small group of participants reported that reading English newspapers helped them improve their English proficiency. One of the participants in the survey mentioned that:

> Reading *The Daily Star* newspaper, most of the time, helped me improve my English proficiency. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 26).

In this regard, Faruq, one of the top-scoring and experienced IELTS test-takers, emphasises the value of reading newspapers for improving his English proficiency. He said:

> I used to read English comic series and newspapers since my childhood. Reading helped me augment my English proficiency.

Major issues of listening comprehension

L2 listeners often encounter a number of listening issues when they try to comprehend a spoken text. L2 listeners rarely comprehend a spoken text without any difficulty. The speaker, the tasks, the situation, and even the listener can all be the causes of listening difficulties (Rost, 2016). The ranking of listening difficulties varies according to the competence level of listeners, differences in listening texts, and listening tasks for comprehension. For example, Renandya and Hu (2018) highlighted ten aspects perceived to be most difficult by teachers and students (Appendix L) and Buck (2001) identified eight linguistic characteristics (Appendix M) of a listening text for listening comprehension difficulty that could be looked into to improve good listening. However, students in the IELTS preparatory course indicated difficulties differently from Buck (2001) and Renandya and Hu (2018). When asked in the survey questionnaire participants identified four major difficulties for their listening comprehension in IELTS listening practice: *unfamiliar accent, speed of speech, unknown topic*, and *unknown vocabulary*. Using a Likert scale they indicated how difficult they found it to deal with each of these obstacles: *very easy*, *easy*, *average*, *difficult*, and *most difficult* (i.e., Figure 10).

In the pre-course survey, candidates were asked to speculate how they tend to perceive the abovementioned aspects of listening comprehension. Regarding unfamiliar accents, 55% of them predicted it as a problem for their listening comprehension by opting for either hard or very hard in the questionnaire. Regarding the speed of speech, 66% of them predicted it as a problem which was considerably more (by 17 %) in comparison to unfamiliar topics, the least challenging obstacle for their listening comprehension. Nonetheless, 49% of the participants identified that unfamiliar topics could be a problem for them to comprehend while listening. The noteworthy finding is that a maximum of 70% of the participants considered unknown vocabulary as either hard or very hard, and so the main problem for their listening comprehension.

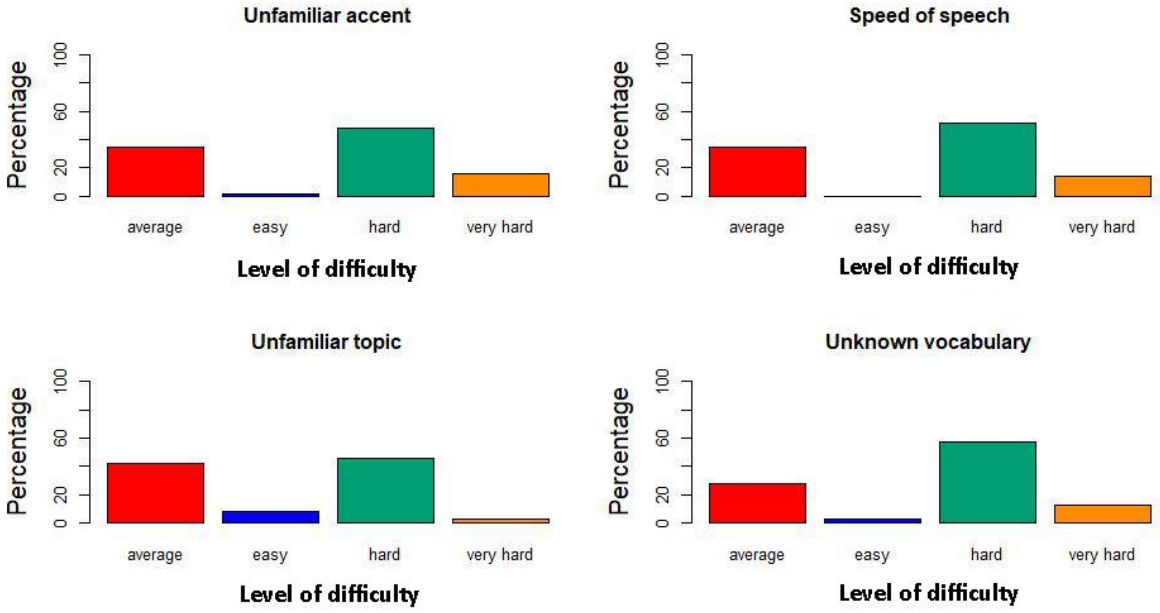

Figure 10. Perceived difficulties in comprehending IELTS listening test (pre-course survey)

In the post-course survey (i.e., Figure 11), the percentage of the candidates who perceived difficulties related to *unfamiliar accent*, *speed of speech*, and *unfamiliar topic* decreased by 8% to 10% respectively to become 64%, 57%, and 41% of the total. However, the percentage in the category of *unknown vocabulary* was considered either *hard* or *very hard* and remained almost unchanged (69%) as the most difficult aspect of listening comprehension.

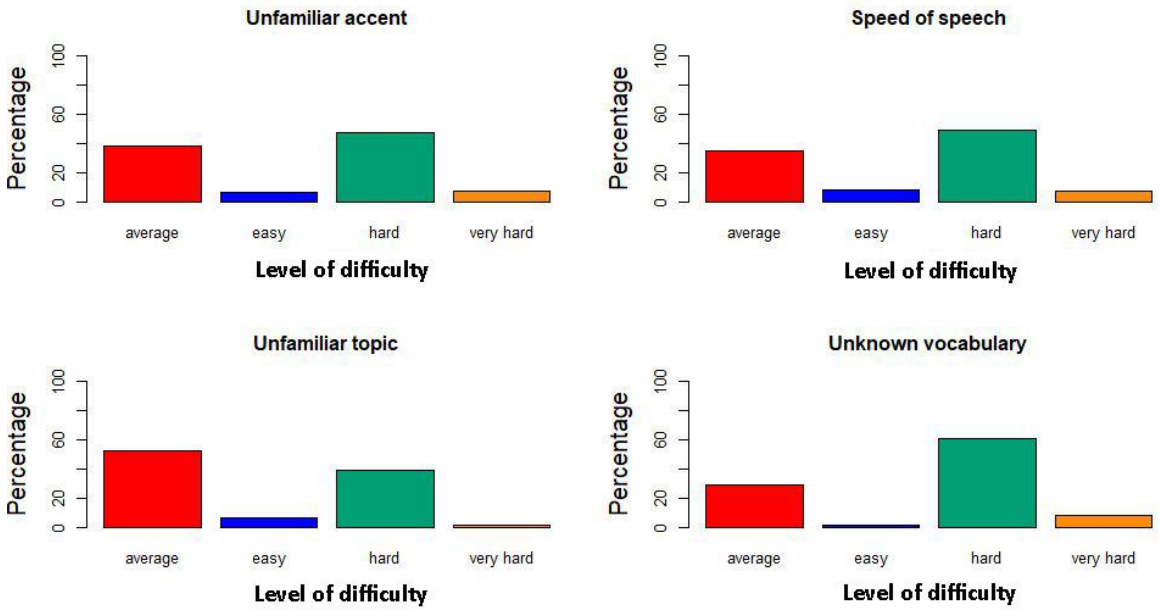

Figure 11. Perceived difficulties in comprehending IELTS listening test (post-course survey)

Unfamiliar accent

When asked about an *unfamiliar accent* in the post-course survey, 64% of the participants found that an *unfamiliar accent* is a barrier to understanding when listening, as in the IELTS practice test they normally listen to British and Australian accents. So, the result suggested that the candidates were not familiar with those accents and possibly they were more used to a Bangladeshi accent which was different from both British and Australian accents.

The trainers and top-scoring test-takers also suggested a number of reasons why an *unfamiliar accent* is liable to cause difficulties for IELTS students. Below are two statements made in interviews.

> Khokon: Since the English language is not the first language in Bangladesh, listening and speaking seem new to those who come to prepare for IELTS. So, they feel uneasy initially as most of the time they don't understand the accent of the speakers of the UK or Australia. They do spelling mistakes while answering the listening test.
>
> Saif: In our country, students usually do not get an English environment to listen to English regularly. Students make mistakes in spelling due to a listening problem. Sometimes they can pick the answer from listening but makes a mistake in spelling and lose marks on the test.
>
> Tiplu: We work with the students on the difficulty of the sound-graphic relationship as English has many words that have different spelling but the same sound, and again the same spelling with a different meaning. So we give them helpful tips to learn how to understand the meaning of similar-sounding words based on the context.
>
> Mashrur: In the listening module, students stumble when they listen to the tape of the test for the first time. The type of spoken English they listened to was alien to them. They are used to listening to the English of Bangladeshi teachers and friends. So, when they listened to the native accent of English, they experienced difficulty with different pronunciations and accents.

Khokon's use of "uneasy" indicates the unfamiliarity of the Bangladeshi students of Bangla-medium schools with accent variations from Australia and the UK. Several research studies

also report that the students are not familiar with other varieties of English accents apart from Bangladeshi pronunciations (Md & Monjur, 2015). Tiplu also acknowledges the difficulty that Bangladeshi IELTS preparatory students face when confronted with accent variation:

> Students often miss known words in a spoken text because they fail to follow the British or Australian accent.

Tiplu's comment further accentuates that the difficulty does not always happen because of unknown vocabulary in a spoken text. It may also happen due to accent variation. The unfamiliarity with British and American accents created difficulty in the listening test for the preparatory students although they knew the relevant word to follow the speech. The secondary students and higher secondary students who came for the preparatory course had had little opportunity to familiarise themselves with the accents of the UK, America, and Australia. Bangladeshi students were used to listening to and practising with Bangladeshi accented audio files available online at their secondary level as a part of their listening practice (NCTB, 2012). However, accent plays a vital role in the *intelligibility* of listening (Grant, 2014). The monolingual context might also act as a barrier for the students without exposure to non-Bangladeshi varieties of English. This notion is supported by the finding of Buck (2001) who argued that listeners of American English would encounter difficulties if they heard an unfamiliar accent such as Indian English. In a similar context in China, which is also an EFL country like Bangladesh, learners were reported to have poor English listening competence as they had limited exposure to authentic English use and English was learned through only formal instructional input (Wang & Fan, 2015). So, one of the probable reasons for listening difficulty was the lack of knowledge of the sound system of a variety of Englishes. In this regard, Ashek, one of the experienced IELTS trainers, stated:

> We do not teach the aspects of phonetics in our IELTS listening module. We do not have time in our course to teach the students about pronunciation aspects.

Ashek's statement indicates that IELTS students are not taught or given the basics of English phonetics to deal with the pronunciation of authentic English due to the time constraints of the course. His statement may also indicate that IELTS teachers also do not think that theoretical knowledge of English phonetics is important to teach IELTS preparatory students for listening test preparation. However, the importance of the teaching pronunciation aspects within pedagogical instruction of listening is highlighted by researchers (Wang & Fan, 2015). Here the question arises whether the Bangladeshi IELTS trainers are well-aware of

contextualising the teaching of theoretical aspects of L2 pronunciation because pronunciation pedagogy is not an endeavour that could follow one-size-fits-all instruction (Grant, 2014). So, training on contextualisation of the pronunciation pedagogy of the Bangladeshi IELTS trainers is needed. Cauldwell (2013) also advocates that before teaching phonological features directly to the students for better listening comprehension, teachers are required to develop their own understanding of phonological features used in speedy speech. Another probable reason can be trainers' misconception that aspects of pronunciation would be developed by only practising more and more listening. However, Grant (2014) highlights that a systematic approach to pronunciation instruction is needed to bolster various aspects of learners' pronunciation (such as *stress in a word, final consonant clusters and grammatical endings, and aspiration of initial consonants*, e.g. /p/,/t/,/k/) to increase a chance of *intelligibility* of authentic English listening. Moreover, awareness of accent variation among the listeners varies from context to context (Watson & Clark, 2015). *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* also recommended to the prospective IELTS test-takers − "listen to accents from a variety of English-speaking countries" (Cullen et al., 2014, p. 141).

Moreover, both Khokon's and Saif's comments about "spelling mistakes" further accentuate the relationship between the phono-orthographic problem and spelling mistakes. If the students are not familiar with the accents of Australia and the UK of the words with homophones (identical pronunciation with different meanings and spelling) they might be confused. This confusion may result in their spelling mistakes (Kay, 1930; Matousek, 2015; Singh, 2017) as one obvious reason is the fact that "the pronunciation of words may also differ greatly from the way they appear in print" (Bloomfield et al., 2010, p. 33). Tilpu's comment (on p. 188) suggests that the students depend considerably on phono-orthographic understanding while spelling the words, especially unfamiliar words. The students actually are familiar with the words when they read but do not recognise the same word when they listen to it. Research also describes that when students do not know the actual spelling of the word, they use their knowledge of phonetic spelling to create an orthographic verbatim of the spelling of the word (Field, 2008b; Tavera, 2017). *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* also suggests that marks on listening would be deducted for spelling mistakes as listeners are tested for their spelling ability as well. It is instructed to the test-takers in *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* to "check your answers, paying attention to your spelling" (p. 37). So, students are tested on whether they can spell words that are used in the context of

normal conversation and whether they are able to hear the difference between letters and words (Cullen et al., 2014).

Mashrur further points out that Bangladeshi students are used to the typical Bangladeshi pronunciation. According to him, any speech with Australian and UK accents seems "alien" to them. By using the word "alien", Mashrur emphasises that the unfamiliar native accents of Australia and the UK are a real difficulty for the students. Mashrur's statement aligns with other research studies that find it challenging to understand speakers with unfamiliar accents, and also find that listeners are slower in processing speech with unfamiliar accents than familiar accents (Potter & Saffran, 2017). The listeners may even be unable to recognise words they already know in a speech stream due to accent variation and dissimilarity between the unfamiliar pronunciation and students' expected pronunciation (Li & Renandya, 2012; Renandya & Hu, 2018).

Moreover, listeners' awareness of accent variation might be a difficulty in terms of intelligibility for those who lack extensive listening input in English (Buckler, Oczak-Arsic, Siddiqui, & Johnson, 2017; Cunningham, 2013) and for those who are less proficient listeners with the difficulty of word recognition and sound discrimination. However, due to the global varieties of English, non-native speakers interact more among themselves, rather than with native speakers (Abeywickrama, 2013; Jenkins, 2006). So, the listeners of the 21st century need to process not only the pronunciation of native accents but also the pronunciation of wide varieties of non-native standards of speaking, and recent research also suggests the need to include non-native standard varieties of English accent in an IELTS listening test (Abeywickrama, 2013). Even the goal of a majority of current L2 teachers has been changed. They target developing the speaking skill of their students to produce speech that is a clear and intelligible speech to the listener rather than targeting perfect native-like pronunciation (Grant, 2014).

On the other hand, two of the top-scoring IELTS test-takers reported that accent variation was not a challenge in comprehending IELTS listening. They stated:

> Faruq: When I hear the word from someone from the US, Germany, India or Bangladesh, the accent does not make any huge difference to me as long as I listen to them carefully and I am interested in that topic. If you talk about something and I am not interested, then I will not listen to comprehend. But I think if I have an interest I will pay attention; it does not matter who

pronounces the word, you will get it one way or another. For example, if you talk about cricket and you are using technical words about cricket and I have no clue what are you talking about, it does not matter if you are speaking, or an American guy or your friend is speaking, I will not get it.

Hafez: So, it can be said that when you have concentration, the familiarity of the topic and interest, no matter whether the accent is of a native or non-native speaker. You can understand IELTS listening.

One of the difficulties for listening comprehension most frequently mentioned by survey participants in the text boxes was *lack of attention*. The following statements exemplified this:

Example 1: Lack of attention is the main problem for me during the IELTS listening test. (Post-course survey, Student no. 101).

Example 2: I am unable to hold my complete attention until the end of the test. (Post-course survey, Student no. 119).

The statements of Faruq and Hafez argue that an unfamiliar accent or variation in accent was not problematic for them in comprehending IELTS listening. According to them, issues such as attention, interest, and familiarity with the topic or context were more necessary than accent variation to leverage IELTS listening. Some researchers, such as Rost and Wilson (2013) and Schmidt (2010) claim that students' difficulty in comprehending spoken text might not happen because of their lack of ability to process "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1985) but because of their inattention and low level of noticing. Due to the lack of attention and notice, while listening, a listener may not be able to covert aural input into the intake for listening comprehension (Schmidt, 2010). It might perhaps appear that both Faruq and Hafez were attentive listeners whenever they received any input and the issue of accent variation of Native speakers (NS) or Non-native speakers (NNS) did not affect them to comprehend spoken text. Faruq's statement further supports the notion of *World Englishes* for the mutually international intelligibility of the English language in the IELTS test (Jenkins, 2006; Kabir, 2018). However, from the statements of Faruq and Hafez, a pertinent issue has been raised, whether students' interest in the topic increases their attention more in comparison to their familiarity with the context or vice versa. Faruq's analogy between cricket and familiar context can be linked with the role of *schemata* which may further indicate the role of

background knowledge in listening comprehension. Many researchers have already considered that if the listeners have previous knowledge of the topic of the spoken text, they can interpret the meaning better and can connect new information to their existing knowledge. Familiarity with the context of listening makes it easier (Bakhtiarvand & Adinevand, 2011; Othman & Vanathas, 2004). Faruq's emphasis on background knowledge, an important issue for listening comprehension, can be connected to the top-down process of listening that requires metacognitive awareness. Faruq's statement also indicated that familiarity with the topic and context might decrease listening anxiety in IELTS. The research argues that students' comprehension of listening tasks decreases when students' anxiety increases during international tests such as IELTS and TOEFL (Golchi, 2012).

Speed of speech

It was mentioned in Figure 5 earlier that a considerable percentage of surveyed students (pre=66% & post= 57%) identified the *speed of speech* as one of the major listening difficulties for their IELTS listening comprehension. This was underpinned by the statements of the IELTS trainers and the top-scoring IELTS test-takers. As the data reached a saturation point, I have cited the frequently mentioned comments on the type of listening difficulty. The comments of the survey participants on *speed of speech* are below:

Example 1− The speed of speech is the main problem for me to follow IELTS listening. (Post-course survey, Student no. 35).

Example 2 − If the speed of speech would be slow I would understand more easily. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 20).

Example 3 − Speedy speech creates a problem to get the speech. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 62).

Example 4 − Speed of speech is the main problem to overcome my listening problem. (Post-course survey, Student no. 75).

Example 5 − Due to the speed of speech, I cannot follow even most of the known words to understand. (Post-course survey, Student no. 111).

Example 6 − I always lose my attention and concentration for speed of

speech. I cannot answer the questions by listening properly. (Post-course survey, Student no. 119).

Example 7 − Our Bangladeshi people's English accent is a bit different and slower than the accent and speed of native people. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 202).

A number of other participants also reported that *speed of speech* was one of the major factors creating an obstacle for the students in IELTS listening. The participants who were IELTS trainers explained the reasons they perceived. Here are two excerpts from the interviews:

Khokon: The problem is that students usually try to grasp word for word in fast speech instead of grasping the theme of the spoken text. Sometimes, the speaker uses a synonym rather than the exact word for the fill-in-the-blank answer (on the IELTS answer sheet). As a result, when there is a synonymous word in a spoken sentence, they don't get time to pick and analyse that for the answer.

Ashek: The questions in sections 1 and 2 of the listening test are easy. Answers are straightforward. But the answers to the questions in sections 3 and 4 remain implied in the spoken text. So, due to fast speed, students may miss the implied information needed for the answer if they try to follow word for word.

Khokon and Ashek explained the issues of difficulties related to the listening comprehension problems of preparatory students. Both Khokon's and Ashek's use of words "try to grasp word for word" and "to follow word for word" respectively indicated that the students suffered from poor decoding skills, the skills that listeners use to process the features of the language such as sounds, words, and meanings from the quick flow of spoken texts. So, when the students listened to the oral text, they tended to focus on the nuances and over-rely on the bottom level of the language. In other words, both Khokon and Ashek's statements highlight that the students have weak bottom-up processing skills of listening but are over-dependent according to speech-processing theory. The *bottom-up* processing can be linked to the action when listeners focus only on words of the spoken text to process grammatical relationships to lexical meaning to form comprehension (Brown & Lee, 2015; Wang & Fan, 2015), not the message as a whole to comprehend the overall meaning of the spoken text.

Khokon's and Ashek's reference to "grasping the theme" and "synonymous word" indicates that students were not able to comprehend the overall theme or synonyms of the spoken topic

in fast speech. The inability of the students could be aligned to the listening comprehension problem of a *top-down* process. The *top-down* process of listening is assumed complementary to the *bottom-up* process and more applicable to the listeners of advanced levels. The process actually concerns listeners' ability to infer meaning from the overall theme and context clues by connecting their schemata to guide and embellish their comprehension of the spoken text (Wang & Fan, 2015; Yeldham, 2018). Despite the speedy pace of speech, if they were able to apply the *top-down* process to comprehend the spoken topic, the chance would be high for them to answer correctly in answering fill-in-the-gap. Students' failure to answer correctly might also happen due to their limited range of vocabulary knowledge. Ashek's statement about the answer to sections 3 and 4 is also complementary to Khokon's opinion. It is reported by Ashek's statement that as students face problems in decoding spoken texts due to the speed of speech, it is unusual for them to comprehend the implied information from the spoken text.

From the statements of Ashek and Khokon, it is evident that preparatory students lack both types of processing abilities to deal with their listening difficulties regarding the *speed of speech*. The difficulties range from *word recognition in-stream speech, suprasegmental aspects*[20], and sound-system to infer meaning from the context of spoken text and connection to background knowledge or schemata.

However, Drinmoi and Ishmam, two of the top-scoring IELTS test-takers, expressed similar experiences to Ashek regarding sections 3 and 4 but differently. Like Ashek, they also reported that they did not face any problem with listening to sections 1 and 2 due to the speed of speech. Nonetheless, both of the participants reported that sections 3 and 4 were the main challenge for preparatory students to comprehend IELTS listening due to the speed of speech. They stated:

> Drinmoi: I have heard many things about the IELTS listening test from others. In the beginning, I used to prepare at home with the Cambridge IELTS reference book. But I could not make much progress at home. Then I took IELTS preparatory course. I always found sections 1 and 2 easier than sections 3 and 4 of IELTS listening. It is because the speed of the spoken texts increases gradually in sections 3 and 4. I often faced problems in these

[20] The aspects of the language related to rhythm, stress, intonation, illusion, and elision patterns of oral speech.

sections. I corrected all the answers in sections 1 and 2 but gave some wrong answers in sections 3 and 4.

Ishmam: In the IELTS listening test, sections 3 and 4 are very speedy. These sections were tough to answer. Actually, you know, the difficulty level of the listening sections gradually increases from low to high.

Drinmoi's statement suggests that listening to sections 1 and 2 seemed to him easy in comparison to sections 3 and 4. So, he took a preparatory course that helped him deal with listening sections 3 and 4 of IELTS effectively. However, Drinmoi accentuates that due to the increase in speech, he made some wrong answers to sections 3 and 4. His statement could be explained in connection with *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* (Cullen et al., 2014). This official book provides guidelines about the contents and the IELTS test to prospective test-takers all over the world. In this guidebook, it is mentioned that "each section is gradually more difficult, p. 9)". The guidebook reports that out of four sections, the first two sections provide spoken texts on a general topic with a transactional purpose. However, the latter two sections provide spoken texts based on academic contexts. Here the question may arise regarding Drinmoi's and Isham's struggling to process their listening for sections 3 and 4, whether it was for the gradual increase of the difficulty for the speed of speech or the content and context of the spoken text.

Moreover, if their difficulty was due to the content and context of the spoken text, it could be linked to their problem with the top-down process of listening that required the use of schemata, guessing word meanings in context, and identifying the main ideas of the spoken text. Otherwise, they might have a weak cognitive perspective of listening comprehension. According to the researchers (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012, p. 171), three phases of cognitive perspective were identified: perception, parsing, and utilisation. Both Drinmoi and Ishmam might suffer from some of the sub-phases of the three main phases while answering sections 3 and 4 in the IELTS listening test. The indication of "understanding the context' by *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* means understanding the topic to help test-takers listen (Cullen et al., 2014). The issue of topic familiarity is discussed further in the following section.

Unknown topic

It was mentioned in Figure 5 earlier that a considerable percentage of surveyed students (pre=49% & post= 41%) identified an *unknown topic* as one of the major listening difficulties for their IELTS listening comprehension. This is underpinned by the statements of the IELTS trainers and the top-scoring IELTS test-takers. Some of the frequently mentioned comments of the survey participants on *unknown topics* are as follows:

Example 1 − If the topic is known then a lot of information is known that helps me to pick answers. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 208).

Example 2 − Familiar topic gives confidence and helps me find out the answers. (Post-course survey, Student no. 89).

Example 3 − If the topic is known to me, it helps me to guess well to the unknown words. (Post-course survey, Student no. 5).

Example 4 − If I listen to a familiar topic, then it is easy to follow the sequence of speaking. (Post-course survey, Student no. 217).

Example 5 − It is helpful to concentrate on listening if the topic is known. (Post-course survey, Student no. 225).

A number of other participants also reported that an *unknown topic* was one of the major factors to create an obstacle for the students in IELTS listening. The participants who are IELTS trainers explained the reasons they perceived. Two excerpts from the interviews are given below:

Tiplu: For example, a student of Chemistry appeared in the IELTS listening test. A topic related to a chemical issue was played. If there were an answer related to the word ‘methane,’ the student of Chemistry would get an advantage to answer correctly. The test-takers of other disciplines might not know the context of the word. There would be a possibility that they might also make a mistake to spell the word. So, familiarity with the topic is a vital issue in listening. A known topic gives an advantage over IELTS listening.

> Saif: In the IELTS listening test, background knowledge of a spoken text is helpful for comprehension. There is a reason. The familiarity with the topic boosts the confidence of a test-taker. The confidence helps them to feel at ease and to get relief from the fear factor of the test. So, they become less stressed which helps them do well in the test.

Tiplu's use of analogy about "methane" and "a student of chemistry" indicates that there is an advantage for a test-taker who has the background knowledge of the topic of the spoken text in the listening test. He accentuates that the probability of answering correctly is higher for those who know the topic than those who do not. Background knowledge is our knowledge of the topic that is spoken about. Moreover, Tiplu further suggests that the issue of "spelling mistakes" is also related to the background knowledge of the topic. Earlier, Tiplu, as well as Saif, reported that *accent variation* is also responsible for the spelling mistakes of the IELTS preparatory students. However, Saif, in his above statement, states the role of background knowledge as a confidence booster to ease the students from stress during the listening test. Saif's statement can be linked to the existing research (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016) where it is argued that there is a significant relationship between low anxiety and high listening performance. Some other researchers also report that test anxiety and stress in examination has become a ubiquitous problem not only in the field of education but also in modern society as many important decisions of our life are related to test results (Spielberger & Vagg, 1995; Trifoni & Shahini, 2011). Another study (Jamieson, Peters, Greenwood, & Altose, 2016) on classroom exam situations also finds that stress has an impact on the performance of the students as students under less anxiety perform well. Even, in a language classroom, the effect of anxiety affects learners' listening performance (Vandergrift & Goh, 2009). Another research study related to IELTS listening (Winke & Lim, 2011) also finds that topic unfamiliarity increases anxiety during the listening test which further affects the listening test scores of the test-takers. So, the use of socio-affective strategies can play a positive role in reducing learners' test anxiety and stress to improve their listening comprehension during the test (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Drinmoi further highlighted two reasons why a topic seemed unfamiliar to the students. He stated:

> A topic seems unfamiliar mainly for two reasons. Firstly, if the listener does not know the content knowledge of the topic. Secondly, if the listener is not familiar with the related vocabulary of the spoken topic.

Drinmoi emphasises that mainly the context and language and our background knowledge made a topic familiar to us during listening. Therefore, Drinmoi's experience is aligned with the top-down process of listening as he emphasised more on the use of previous knowledge in processing his spoken text. His further emphasis is on the related vocabulary of the spoken text to make the topic familiar and to allow listeners to understand the topic easily. The role of vocabulary in listening comprehension is discussed in detail in the next section.

Unknown vocabulary

It was mentioned in Figure 5 earlier that the highest percentage of surveyed students (pre=70% & post= 69%) identified *unknown vocabulary* as one of the major listening difficulties for their IELTS listening comprehension. This was underpinned by the statements of the IELTS trainers and the top-scoring IELTS test-takers. Some of the frequently mentioned comments of the survey participants on *unknown vocabulary* are as follow:

Example 1 − Unknown vocabulary is the main problem to follow listening. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 230).

Example 2 − Unknown words are a problem not understanding the content of listening. (Post-course survey, Student no. 233).

Example 3 − Listening becomes difficult for unknown words. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 12).

Example 4 − The topic of a conversation is difficult to understand due to a lack of unknown vocabulary and synonyms. (Post-course survey, Student no. 55).

Example 5 − Unknown words are a problem to understand a conversation. (Post-course survey, Student no. 177).

Example 6 − I cannot follow words in listening. Unknown vocabulary is the main problem in understanding listening. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 202).

The interviews with the trainers and top-scoring test-takers also considered 'unknown vocabulary' as the most difficult obstacle for listening comprehension. Two of the top-scoring IELTS test-takers stated:

Faruq: If somebody, say, for example, a medical doctor and he is using highly technical words that are not familiar to me, then I will not understand them. As soon as he starts talking in familiar words, I will catch him instantly, no matter what accent he speaks. So, it is a very pluralistic and holistic thing that I use to comprehend listening.

Drinmoi: One of the major reasons for the difficulty in sections 3 and 4 is vocabulary. Knowing the related vocabulary of a speech gives an advantage. I often find that I had difficulty understanding the whole speech. It is because I did not know one or two main words of the speech. A test-taker should know more words. Only then, he can deal with those answers that require the synonymous meaning of a word.

Faruq's statement indicates that unfamiliar technical words in an aural text may create difficulty for the students in listening. His analogy of "a medical doctor" and "technical word" argues the importance of known vocabulary in an aural text to comprehend listening better. He also highlighted that known vocabulary helps students understand the meaning of the aural text better. According to Faruq, familiar vocabulary helps the students to adjust to the accent varieties of those known words to decipher the meaning of the spoken text. In this regard, Faruq's statement differs from the statements of Khokon, Saif, Tiplu, and Mashrur who prioritised unknown accents as the main barrier to comprehending listening well. However, Faruq's statement is aligned with research evidence that argues the impact of large vocabulary size on better listening comprehension (Tan & Goh, 2016).

Drinmoi, however, highlights the problems related to unknown vocabulary specifically for sections 3 and 4 of IELTS listening. His statement indicates that if he does not know even a keyword or words of the speech, it creates trouble for him to understand the meaning of the whole spoken text. However, it is always important to understand the overall meaning of the

whole speech if a test-taker wants to be correct in the maximum answers of the aural texts of sections 3 and 4. The reason is that in these sections the answers require synonyms of the keywords of the spoken text. Therefore, the more words a student knows the better s/he can deal with the answers that require the synonymous meaning of a word. *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* (Cullen et al., 2014) also notes that to answer the questions in section 3 of the IELTS listening test, a test taker is required to know a synonym of the word for that answer. In doing so, a test-taker is supposed to hear a conversation between two or three people in an academic context, for example, discussing an academic assignment. Here is the direct quote from *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS:* "The speakers you will hear in the listening paper often use different words to those in the questions. For example, you may hear a synonym" (Cullen et al., 2014, p. 232).

Two of the participant trainers, Tiplu and Khokon, also identified the issue of *unknown vocabulary* as the main shortcoming for the preparatory students. They stated:

> Tiplu: Many IELTS students do not have a vocabulary range of upper-Intermediate level. So, when they listen to an unknown word they become unconfident in the listening test. So, when they fail to understand a spoken sentence for an unknown word, it leads them to miss another subsequent sentence. It lowers their score on the listening test. A wide vocabulary range also helps a student to do well in reading, writing and speaking.

> Khokon: Students have a problem. They come to our preparatory course with a limited vocabulary. So, students do not have the required level of vocabulary to start the preparatory course. But IELTS listening requires a good level of word stock. The listening test also requires an answer in a word or two.

Both Tiplu and Khokon identify that the IELTS preparatory students have a more limited vocabulary than they are supposed to have before starting their preparatory course. According to Tiplu, the limited range of vocabulary affects the preparatory students' ability to comprehend listening in two ways. Firstly, a lack of vocabulary knowledge makes them unconfident during listening comprehension and that can result in their low score. As discussed previously, confidence is an important element for students while listening. Secondly, if students lose confidence, the missing of one chunk of the aural text leads a student to difficulty following the next chunk of the aural text. Consequently, the chance is high for them to miss several relevant words to answer their listening test questions. Gilakjani

and Sabouri (2016) also posit that knowing the meaning of words has a positive impact on students' listening comprehension by raising their interest and motivation. Many of the IELTS candidates do not know that knowledge of vocabulary is also tested in the listening test. The observations of Tiplu's and Khokon's statements also align with the existing research (Brown, 2011; Underwood, 1989) that when listeners listened to an unknown word they thought about the meaning of that word for a moment and missed the next part of the aural text.

Moreover, there is a high possibility that the assessors of the listening test may select many words based on the intermediate to advanced range of vocabulary as the IELTS test is supposed to be taken by the students who have passed higher secondary or above. Therefore, if the test-takers are not familiar with those words, they may face a problem in the IELTS listening test. So, particularly, if a candidate has a wide range of vocabulary, he/she tends to do better in the IELTS listening test (Pell, 2018). *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* also advised that along with all aspects of English, a test-taker should study vocabulary to improve their IELTS score (Cullen et al., 2014). Although the research (Nation & Beglar, 2007) related to vocabulary suggests that a vocabulary size of 6000-7000 word families is sufficient for comprehension of 95-98% of spoken texts, it is still problematic to say that the abovementioned range of vocabulary is enough to comprehend 95-98% of IELTS listening texts as the IELTS listening tasks cover a huge range of spoken topics.

Comprehension difficulties related to types of speech

Participants were asked to identify the difficulties in perceiving different types of speech and to express their reasons for why they found the difficulties. In the IELTS listening test, test-takers take the same listening test both for academic and general training. The test is approximately 30 minutes long, and a test-taker gets an additional 10 minutes to write the answers on a given answer sheet. There is a fixed format for this listening test. The test is divided into four separate parts, with a total of 40 questions. Each part carries 10 questions and each question carries one mark. Parts 1 and 2 are based on social contexts and parts 3 and 4 are based on academic contexts (as shown in Table 7). The tape is played once only. The types of contexts are given below:

Table 7. *Describes different contexts of the listening test. Adapted from "The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS" (Cullen et al., 2014, p. 9)*

Section	Context	Number of Interlocutors
1.	Social (e.g. a general topic with a transactional purpose).	Usually a conversation between two people
2.	Social (e.g. giving information about events in the community).	Usually a monologue
3.	Academic (e.g. student/s and a tutor discussing an academic topic).	Usually a conversation between two or three people
4.	Academic (e.g. a lecture)	A monologue

All four sections of the listening test cover different types of tasks that include different question types to be answered for all 40 questions (Cullen et al., 2014). Below are the types of tasks that a test-taker may find in any part of the test. There may be one to three different tasks per section (as shown in Table 8).

Table 8. *Describes different types of tasks for the listening test. Adapted from "The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS" (Cullen et. al., 2014, p. 9).*

Task type	What does a test-taker have to do?
Notes/summary/table/flow-chart completion	Complete notes/a summary/table/flow-chart with a suitable word or words within the word limit given.
Multiple choices	Choose one answer from alternatives A-C. Choose two answers from alternatives A-E.
Short-answer questions	Answer questions in the word limit given.
Sentence completion	Complete a sentence with a suitable word or words within the word limit given.

Labelling a diagram, plan, or map	Complete a sentence with a suitable word or words within the word limit given.
Classification	Classify the information given in the question according to three different criteria (A, B or C). These may be dates, names, types, etc.
Matching	Match a list of statements to a list of possible answers in a box (e.g. people, theories, or dates).

Out of the four parts of the listening test, the majority of the students identified part 3 and part 4 as the most difficult parts for them to answer in the listening test. A number of students as well as the trainers reported that the difficulty was caused due to the context of the listening text. More specifically to mention, part 3 seemed difficult for them as there were multiple speakers usually in a group dialogue on a specific issue. As far as part 4 was concerned, participants reported that it was difficult for them to follow the monologue for the speed of the text and to sort out implied answers from the spoken text to answer. Both Figures 12 and 13 for the pre and post-surveys showed that the highest percentage of the participants responded to *group dialogue* and *academic monologue* as their most difficult listening texts to comprehend and answer.

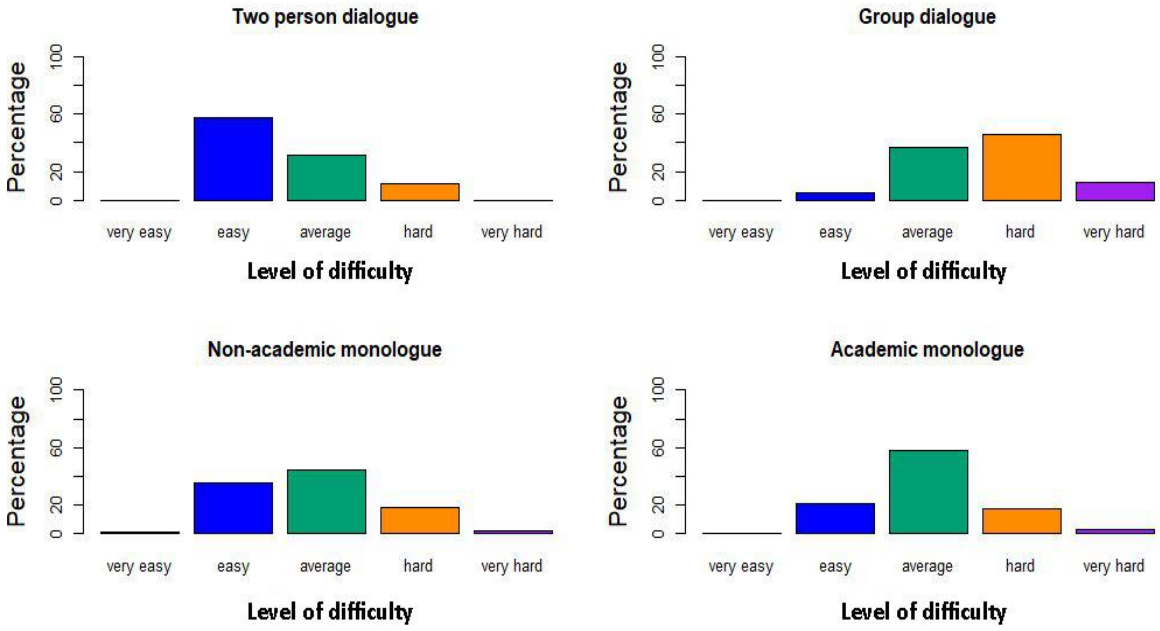

Figure 12. Shows the percentage of difficulties of different types of listening tasks (pre-course survey)

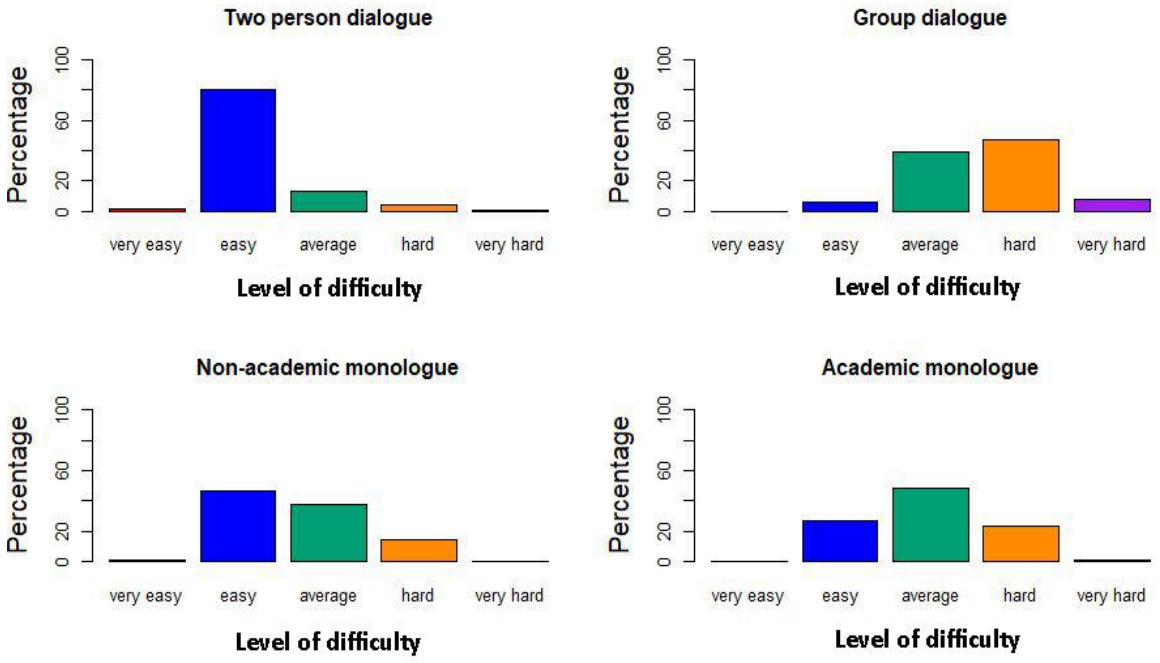

Figure 13. Shows the percentage of difficulties of different types of listening tasks (post-course survey)

Part 3 of the listening test

As far as the types of listening tasks are concerned, the majority of the participants, in the survey questionnaire, identified the most difficult task to answer as one where there is a conversation between two to four people. The context of the task is often for educational or training purposes. This task often comes under part 3 of the listening test. The types of answers to the task include: sentence completion, labelling a diagram, plan, or map. One of the most frequently mentioned comments of the survey participants about the questions of part 3 was:

> **Example 1:** Group conversation is a problem to perceive who is talking about what to find out the answers. (Post-course survey, Student no. 73).

> **Example 2:** Group discussion part is difficult to understand as I can't identify who is who. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 88).

> **Example 3:** Group conversation is difficult due to speedy speech and many people's speaking and who is talking what. (Post-course survey, Student no. 101).

> **Example 4:** Group discussion is hard to follow to answer, as I cannot identify who is who! Lack of vocabulary knowledge is another problem to find out the correct option from the multiple options. (Post-course survey, Student no. 155).

A number of other participants also reported that the questions related to "group conversation" tasks were one of the major difficult tasks for their listening comprehension in the test. The task usually is in section 3. Ashek and Saif, the IELTS trainers, explained the reasons they perceived the candidates faced problems in the listening test. Two excerpts from the interviews are given below:

> Ashek: The conversations in section 1 are easier than in section 3. The main reason is the gradual increase in speed. In section 3, there will be a conversation among many people that may be up to four. So, the candidate has to understand who speaks when. That is another difficulty. Nevertheless, I think the candidate has to face it in real life.

Saif: The question type is different in section 3. For example, the question with multiple choices and matching an option to the themes or persons from the conversations. The answers to this section do not need to comprehend a certain section of the spoken text only. A candidate has to choose the correct answer from multiple choices. This is often difficult for the weaker or average test-takers. Except for the correct answer, the other options are distractors. Sometimes the speaker utters one option, for example, option A, but sometimes they pronounce the correct option but later cancel it. Sometimes they utter the correct option and then again confirm it. So, to answer the questions from a group discussion, a candidate must understand the complete theme. Otherwise, it is difficult to answer the questions.

Ashek indicates that the conversation was comparatively easy in section 1 than in section 3. However, the contexts of both sections of the listening test are different. Ashek's statement indicates that he found section 3 more difficult as he might not be familiar with the question types of that section although he acknowledged that he struggled to cope with the pace of the conversation. Other research studies argue that the complex interaction among different components of a task makes it difficult to determine the level of difficulty of that listening test item (Vandergrift & Goh, 2009). Ashek's use of the phrase "who speaks when" also indicates that he might have an issue related to information processing in memory. His report indicated that to follow one speaker among multiple voices, a test-taker needs to apply both *working memory*[21] and *recognition memory*[22] capacity to comprehend aural text properly to give the correct answer. Researchers also argued that IELTS tasks require working memory as this has a significant influence on the performance of the listening comprehension of the test-takers (Amir & Mitra, 2017). Other SLA researchers also supported the role of short-term memory more than long-term memory in processing and decoding language (Al-Hammadi, 2012; Ellis, 2008) because when an L2 listener with limited language knowledge listens to something, his/her working memory suffers as he/she has to focus consciously on every detail they listened to. This situation actually delimits his/her capacity of working memory for better comprehension (Vandergrift, 2004). However, Saif's statement

[21] It refers to a brain function that provides short-term storage of necessary information in cognitive tasks such as language comprehension, learning, and reasoning (Fay & Buchweitz, 2014).
[22] It refers to long-term memory that remembers and recognize an item or event that occurred in past (Al-Hammadi, 2012)

accentuated that the type of tasks and questions in section 3 also needed *long-term memory* support for listening comprehension.

According to Saif, to answer both *multiple-choice types* and *match an option*, a test-taker is supposed to listen not only for the correct answer but also to keep in memory the other incorrect options to compare and filter for the correct answer. As he said, the other options are used as distractors as the speakers mention a piece of information related to those options to be answered but later canceled in multiple-choice type questions; sometimes they mention the related information of the answer in one option but confirm the information by adding something specific in another option which is the correct answer for that question. In this regard, *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* endorsed this notion (use of distractors) for the correct answer to multiple type choice questions in section 3. It said, "Distractors are the incorrect answers to a question. Identifying distractors helps you to choose the correct answer and shows you have understood the Listening text" (Cullen et al., 2014, p. 22). The research related to second language learning also emphasised the role of memory capacity for processing and analysing language input through listening and reading (Ellis, 2008). Saif's further statement using the phrase "weaker or average test-takers" denotes that students with a low level of listening proficiency have a high probability of facing more problems to answer multiple-choice type questions. It could turn out that both their short-term and long-term memory constrains them as the students have to process and recollect the complete theme of the aural text simultaneously for the correct answer out of the distractors of multiple choices. Research also highlighted that individual differences in memory capacity influence the performance of listening comprehension (Fay & Buchweitz, 2014; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005).

However, Tiplu (one of the trainers), and Drinmoi (an experienced top-scoring test-taker), reported different reasons for the difficulty of answering multiple-choice type questions in section 3 by the test-takers. They stated:

> Tiplu: A candidate is only required to pick a lead phrase or a keyword to answer in sections 1 and 2. However, section 3 requires a complete comprehension of the group discussion. A candidate has to deal with multiple accents of different people in this section. This is the reason that makes the task more difficult.

Drinmoi: Specifically, in a group conversation, it is difficult to pick the right speaker for the right answer when there are 3 to 4 people in a conversation. The test-taker needs to switch from one accent to the other during the conversation.

Tiplu identifies that through focused listening to search for the keywords or phrases, only the *bottom-up* process would be enough to answer correctly in sections 1 and 2. However, section 3 required a combined use of *bottom-up* and *top-down* processes of listening. Moreover, Tiplu and Drinmoi argue that the difficulty of the test-takers to perceive and answer the questions related to group discussion is not associated with the lack of long-time memory support; rather, it is due to the variation of multiple accents as they were unable to identify the speakers during their listening. *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* also averred that a test-taker would hear accents of native speakers from several English-speaking countries, however, mainly British, American, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand accents (Cullen et al., 2014).

Himel, an experienced top-scoring test-taker, found the task of section 3 difficult due to the aural text related to a group conversation. He stated:

> Students face difficulty mainly in section 3. Here students have to face the difficulty of a group conversation of three to four people. Multiple people talks one after another that puzzles the students. They find it challenging to identify who talks about what. Many of them can't pick the information to answer the questions.

However, Himel's use of the word "puzzle" hints that his difficulty was not for the accent variations of the speakers but the inability to recognise the speakers. The reason might be for their lack of the required level of undivided attention, or their attention was divided due to the shift from one speaker to the other which was an obstacle for them to find out the correct answer. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) also found that sometimes the slightest break during listening could prevent the required comprehension of the speech. Shiraji also supports Himel's statement that attentive listening only will not be enough to answer multiple-choice type questions. Shiraji said:

> I felt multiple-choice-type questions as the toughest to answer. Only attentive listening is not sufficient to correct answers. You also have to focus on listening to eliminate the wrong options.

Hafiz, however, points to the issue of finding synonyms to account for his difficulty in answering multiple-type questions from a group conversation in the listening test. He stated:

> I found a group conversation of 2 to 4 people difficult. The questions were multiple types of choice. It was hard for me to choose the correct answer. Often a synonym is spoken. So, it is not easy to select the right option.

Hafiz's reference to "synonym" indicates that the answers are not exactly uttered in the spoken texts of the speakers. The test-takers have to match a word with a closer meaning of the spoken word from the multiple-choice options. One probable reason for Hafiz's comprehension difficulty might be related to one or two of the issues of the taxonomy of micro-skills of listening comprehension, such as not being able to "distinguish between literal and implied meaning" or "detecting keywords, guessing the meaning of words from context" (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 327). The reason might also be Hafiz's difficulty in inferential listening which could be connected to the lack of top-down approaches to listening.

Part 4 of the listening test

In terms of the difficulty related to task types, a monologue is played in part 4. It is usually a lecture or talk of general academic interest, such as a university talk. A number of survey participants find aural text and related questions difficult in the listening test. Some of the most frequently mentioned comments of the survey participants about the questions of part 4 are:

> **Example 1:** Monologue-type speech is difficult to maintain the pace with the spoken script. So, it is hard to follow to answer. (Post-course survey, Student no. 223).

> **Example 2**: Speed of speech is the main problem in both formal and informal monologue to understand listening. (Pre-course survey, Student no. 236).

> **Example 3**: Speedy Monologue is very difficult to understand. (Post-course survey, Student no. 85).

> **Example 4**: Too much fast speaking creates a problem in section 4. (Post-course survey, Student no. 55).

Example 5: Academic monologue is problematic because it is too speedy to decipher the answer. It is fast and that is why I missed the answers. (Post-course survey, Student no. 69).

A number of other participants also reported several factors that made part 4 most difficult for the test-takers. In part 4, there are questions related to a monologue for listening comprehension in the listening test. Drinmoi, one of the top-scoring and experienced IELTS test-takers stated in this regard:

> After starting my preparatory course, I was getting good scores for reading and writing modules on mock tests. However, I was not getting a good score for listening as I had a problem with section 4 of this module.

Drinmoi's statement points out the task in section 4 made it problematic for him to score more in listening tests in comparison to his reading and writing scores. His statement also indicates that if anyone does well in answering the questions of section 4, he or she can increase the overall IELTS band score. Faruq, another top-scoring and experienced IELTS test-taker, reports the importance of general knowledge and vocabulary issues to comprehend the monologue in section 4 better. He stated:

> The topic and vocabulary used in section 4 are not difficult for those test-takers who are well-informed about current issues. Otherwise, it will be difficult for those who lack general knowledge. Here the flow of information is not sequential. The answers to the questions do not come in order. So, it is a challenge for most of the test-takers to answer the questions. Many students usually wait for the keyword or the relevant information to answer but they fail to do that in this section.

Drinmoi's statement argues that as the "flow of information" in the task of section 4 does not come in order, a test-taker has to apply inferential listening to process the information required to answer. His argument reinstates the need for activating schemata and assigning background information to the aural text of this section to comprehend a plausible interpretation of the overall subject matter. So, the task in section 4 requires the assimilation of bottom-up and top-down processes of listening. Drinmoi's reflection on the application and importance of the role of schemata is also recommended in *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* as a means to deal with the type of task in this section. It suggests using a

brief description of the tape which is provided on the IELTS test paper before the speaker's talk that tells who the speaker would be and what is the purpose of the monologue so that a test-taker could use that information to get a clear idea of the situation (Cullen et al., 2014). Drinmoi's comment that "questions do not come in order" can be aligned to the role of the memory capacity of a test-taker.

On the other hand, Saif, an IELTS trainer, signifies the pattern of the task types of the listening test for the listening difficulty in section 4. He stated:

> Most of the learners find the last section the most difficult. I think it is because of the format of the test design. They wanted to make the difficulty level in ascending order. So, the first section of the listening test is the easiest one, and the last section is the hardest. A test-taker has to listen and comprehend everything in the monologue. He does not get the answer directly in the monologue. He needs to infer the answers from the monologue. Most of the time, the answer remains implied… [It] requires listening between the lines to answer the questions.

It is known that IELTS is a test to assess proficiency in English as a second language. Saif's statement about using "the format of the test design" denotes the process of test designs in second language proficiency assessment. In the IELTS listening test, there is no pass or fail benchmark. The overall proficiency is measured on a band score. Each band corresponds to a specific level of English competence ranging from band 0 to band 9 score. For example, band score 6 = competent user, band score 7 = good user, 8 = very good user (Appendix K). Therefore, to maintain the construct validity of the listening test, like any other proficient test, IELTS also might have used a standard test procedure (Green, 2014). So, while interpreting a test score for a proficiency test, a key statistical concept named "the normal distribution" is used as a standard procedural concept. The distribution procedure takes the shape of a bell curve that is symptomatic of a normal distribution of scores (Frey, 2018). Statistically, this procedure is based on two attributes: *mean* and *standard deviation*. Saif's further comment on the gradual increase of the sections from the easiest to the hardest could be aligned to the intended indication of this procedure in the listening test as the difficulty level of tasks usually ascend pro rata with an increase in band score. The test might be designed following that procedure so that the calculation of the standard deviation and the average test score of all the test-takers of that specific test falls under the normal distribution. Although this type of standardised test pattern is followed to ensure the construct validity of the test, it is debatable

as in reality, most often, the test score does not follow this normal distribution (Green, 2014) and needs skewed distortions up to an acceptable level. Moreover, from a student's cognitive point of view, it could not be said that the ascending level of difficulty of each section would be the same for every participant. So, section 4 might seem toughest to a particular test-taker but might not seem the same to another test-taker of a listening test although *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* considered "the topics and language in listening sections 3 and 4 are more complex" (Cullen et al., 2014, p. 383).

However, Khokon and Ashek differ from Saif's concept about section 4 being assumed the toughest section in the listening test. They found three major reasons: lack of consistent attention, the fast pace of the speaker, and the need for a synonymous word to answer, as the main factors for the listening difficulties of the students. They said:

> Khokon: There is a long and formal monologue in section 4 for the listening test. Students require consistently long attentive listening…many of them lose concentration until the end. So, they fail to answer some of the questions. For example, when the speaker is speaking something to answer question number 38, the test-taker hangs on to answer 35. On top of that, in other sections, they need only to pick the keyword or lead phrase to answer. However, in section 4, students need to pick a synonym rather than an exact keyword.
>
> Ashek: In the fourth section, test-takers listen to a monologue on an academic issue. They listen to someone who speaks in a public hall or on an academic occasion. Here the speaker is usually very fast.

Khokon's statement further highlights the importance of attention for listening comprehension. The listeners require a consistent level of conscious attention to comprehend the long monologue. His comment indicates the length of the spoken text as the reason that is liable for losing consistent attention. It is probably due to the tiredness of memory of the test-taker that attention to the monologue is lost as this is the last section of the listening test and the test-taker has been giving attention to listening for the last 20 minutes. This situation is coupled with the problem of picking a synonym from the spoken text to answer some of the questions in this section. Ashek's statement further added the problem of the speed of the speaker for the difficulty of comprehending the monologue in section 4.

Part 2 of the listening test

A group of survey participants, however, identified the task of labelling a diagram, plan, map, or graph with an answer-word or choosing a possible answer from a box or list in section 3 as the most difficult in the listening test. Some of the most frequently mentioned comments of the survey participants about the questions of part 2 were:

> **Example 1**: Graphs or maps are not helpful. It creates difficulty as it creates confusion. (Post-course survey, Student no. 73).

> **Example 2**: Try to concentrate more to answer from the graphs but I lose my concentration very often. (Post-course survey, Student no. 95).

> **Example 3**: Diagrams or maps create confusion, as I have to concentrate on both the listening and the picture for the answers. (Post-course survey, Student no. 141).

From the frequent statements of the survey participants, it is evident that questions related to a graph/diagram or map are difficult for the test-takers to answer. However, *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* explains that a graph/diagram/map is given for understanding a direction to a place, getting a description of a location, or labelling a map from a box of options to answer for a spoken text in a better way. In this regard, the guidebook instructs the test-takers by saying, "study the map or plan carefully before you listen. Having a clear image in your mind will help you understand what you hear" (p. 25). Research also recommends that *pre-listening* helps students provide necessary background information for a listening activity. *Pre-listening* also helps the learners to activate a schemata process to gain a hint about the probable listening text that facilitates better listening (Brown & Lee, 2015; Richards, 2015). Shiraji's statement also aligns with the comments of the survey participants about the difficulty of answering the questions related to graphs/diagrams or maps in section 2. He differs from Saif, Khokon, and Ashek in terms of considering section 4 as the toughest section. Shiraji reports the task in section 2 as the most difficult one. He stated:

> I felt most difficulty with graph or table or map-related questions. To answer the questions in graph, table, or map, a test-taker has to understand the graph, map, or table, fill in the gaps, or choose from a box of possible answers, and listen to the text at the same time. I think this is difficult for the brain to process […] the answers do not follow the sequence of the questions in the graph, table, or map.

Shiraji's statement using the phrase "brain to process" indicates that the difficulty for the test-takers to answer the questions from listening related to graph/diagram or map might be mainly for cognitive factors rather than linguistic factors as the test-takers are unable to process and store listening input simultaneously. Research also argues that students' lack of ability to concurrently process and store input affects their listening comprehension (Fay & Buchweitz, 2014; Renukadevi, 2014). However, for some listeners, visual images could help store, link, and retrieve target words from listening text successfully (Al-Hammadi, 2012) and for others, the presence or absence of visual cues does not affect their listening comprehension (Wang & Fan, 2015).

Listening comprehension strategies advised and applied by the participants

This section reports the strategies that the Bangladeshi IELTS test-takers used to deal with the difficulties related to the listening tasks in separate four sections. The preceding comments and reflections of the IELTS trainers, experienced test-takers, and preparatory students have included several listening comprehension strategies they applied to deal with their listening comprehension in IELTS listening. The strategies they applied and advised were based mostly on top-down and least on bottom-up approaches that can be further understood in connection with the cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies and how low-proficiency, high-proficiency, and advanced listeners utilised these strategies effectively in their listening. Some of the most frequently mentioned advice of the survey participants that they applied for the listening comprehension strategies are as follow:

Example 1: Guessing keywords, trying to understand everything. (Post-course survey, Student no. 5).

Example 2: I look for keywords or phrases. (Post-course survey, Student no. 39).

Example 3: Marking distractors to find out the right answer in multiple-choice Questions. (Post-course survey, Student no. 11).

Example 4: I try to concentrate and give full attention as much as possible to understand more to the answer (Post-course survey, Student no. 113).

Example 5: I try to check the question paper before listening to the questions,

find out the probable keywords to answer, and look up the relevant numbers, names, and information from the tape. (Post-course survey, Student no. 23).

Example 6: Read the script before the listening starts and listen for the content words for answers and try to listen attentively for the content words. (Post-course survey, Student no. 73).

Example 7: To identify keywords and content words from the extract of listening. Underline those words and try to read the passage before listening (Post-course survey, Student no. 75).

Example 8: Try to find out keywords, stressed words and content words, maintaining time management, try to understand (Post-course survey, Student no.171).

All the above-mentioned examples indicate that preparatory students applied a variety of strategies when comprehending different aural texts. Examples 1 and 2 indicate that some of the students focused on *selective listening* to search for key content words or to guess keywords to answer the listening test. In selective listening, a listener listens to extract key information and construct that information in a meaningful way to answer the required questions. So, the emphasis on strategy instruction is based on developing students' top-down strategies in their IELTS preparatory course. According to the taxonomy of listening strategies (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012), this type of strategy is related to the meta-cognitive process of listening. However, several research studies argued that low-proficient or ineffective listeners applied only the bottom-up approach to their listening comprehension and they tried to understand everything verbatim in the aural text (Brown & Lee, 2015; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). However, contradictory evidence was reported previously by other research studies that suggested that low-proficient listeners constantly used top-down strategies instead of bottom-up strategies to compensate for their required linguistic knowledge for listening comprehension (Tsui & Fullilove, 1998).

Examples 3 and 4 demonstrate that some of the preparatory students applied the strategies related to *directed attention* to eliminating distractors and continued to listen attentively, especially to answer the multiple-choice type questions. They also applied *real-time assessment of input* to help them assess the listening parts of distractions and determine the

potential value of the upcoming input of the listening text. According to the taxonomy of listening strategies (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012), these strategies are related to the meta-cognitive process of listening supported by a top-down approach to listening comprehension.

Examples 5 and 6 and 7 highlight that some of the preparatory students applied the strategies related to both *pre-listening preparation* and *comprehension monitoring* to comprehend their listening text and find the answers. By applying their *pre-listening preparation*, it seemed that they took the chance to prepare themselves mentally for a listening task and probable content words for the answers. Moreover, by applying their *comprehension monitoring* strategy, they confirmed their understanding of the listening text, at the same time, identifying those words or ideas that were not understood while listening. This strategy helped them check ongoing interpretation within the context of the aural text, connecting their prior knowledge to that aural text. According to the taxonomy of listening strategies (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012), these strategies are aligned with the meta-cognitive process of listening supported by a top-down approach to listening comprehension. Example 8 demonstrates that some of the preparatory students applied all the above-mentioned meta-strategies along with *planning* strategy for their listening, as they said "maintaining time management" was one of the listening strategies. Manage time through *planning* could be very helpful to answer all 40 questions of the IELTS listening test, which was also echoed by an IELTS trainer later in this section.

The suggestions of the survey participants regarding their use of strategies for IELTS listening comprehension highlight that most of the students apply their meta-cognitive strategies based on the top-down process. The use of cognitive listening strategies based on the bottom-up approach was missing by the preparatory students. However, the research argues that advanced listeners usually develop their cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective listening strategies to deal with their listening difficulties using both *bottom-up* and *top-down* approaches judiciously (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Jacobsen, 2015). This situation of the preparatory students generates two questions about the lack of use of *cognitive* and *socio-affective* listening strategies of listening. Either it might happen as both the students and trainers are not aware of these approaches and strategies of listening comprehension or the trainers might know but they only train the students for the test. In other words, the trainers' main focus might be on preparing the students for the test-oriented listening practice not teaching them the process of listening. So, the practice of listening, focusing on listening for a testing purpose, again, does not mean the teaching of listening.

Listening comprehension strategies advised and applied by the trainers to the preparatory students

This section points out the advice that the IELTS trainers taught and applied to the preparatory students in the preparatory course to deal with the questions related to the listening test. Ashek, one of the IELTS trainers, suggests several strategies to improve listening comprehension. He stated:

> I think a test-taker needs to learn a word with all possible meanings. There should be a combination of both listening and reading skills. We play the audio. The students will listen to it. At the same time, they will read the transcript of the spoken text. After that, we, the teachers, will explain the unfamiliar words in context. This is the way how we develop IELTS listening for the students.

Ashek's statement highlights the need for learning vocabulary with all possible meanings as a part of the main strategy to develop better listening comprehension. In doing so, he not only emphasised listening to the word but also suggested reading the transcript of the spoken text simultaneously. His statement aligns with the concurrent phono-orthographic improvement to deal with an unfamiliar word in context. However, Ashek's statement indicates that the IELTS trainers put the preparatory students on a perpetual cycle of listening, answering, and checking answers that indicate the absence of teaching or preparing the students through the process of listening. Tiplu's strategy has specified a certain kind of listening practice for better listening comprehension in the IELTS listening test. He stated:

> We (*indicating his colleagues*) always advise students to listen to BBC English news more. I think watching English movies with subtitles does not help much as many trainers think. It is because the accent and speed of the IELTS listening test are similar to BBC English news.

Tiplu's statement highlights two things. Firstly, his strategy for listening improvement specifies listening to a certain kind of listening input which is BBC English news. Secondly, his words "movies with the subtitle do not help" challenge one of the commonly assumed strategies that watching movies with subtitles might help improve ESL listening comprehension (Ghoneam, 2015; Janfaza, Jelyani, & Soori, 2014). Tiplu might be indicating that giving simultaneous attention to visual, reading, and listening tasks would increase the cognitive load to processes in the brain that could lower the focus on listening. Some

researchers also argued that video with subtitles does not facilitate but rather distracts listeners (Vandergrift & Goh, 2009). In this regard, Vandergrift (2004) said captions might facilitate immediate comprehension; however, their usefulness for learning to listen is still a matter of debate. Students will not learn how to listen if they become dependent on reading captions to understand listening texts.

Tiplu's statement argued that listening to texts of BBC news is compatible with IELTS listening texts in terms of accent and speed. However, his suggestion to listen to BBC news might help students to a certain extent. The speakers use the standard accent of British English, but in IELTS, the speakers use a wide variety of native accents of English-speaking countries according to *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* (Cullen et al., 2014). So, IELTS preparatory students might need to practice other varieties of native accents along with BBC English news. Both Ashek's and Tiplu's strategies align with the research findings that argue that listening along with an audio transcript helps more than listening without an audio transcript. Research also found that students who listened to BBC news improved their listening better than those who listened to video transcripts (Cardenas-Claros & Campos-Ibaceta, 2018; Vandergrift & Goh, 2009).

However, the statement of Shiraji, one of the EILTS trainers, regarding the IELTS listening preparation strategy using "English movies with subtitles" differed from both Ashek and Tiplu. He said:

> As a part of my IELTS listening preparation, I used to watch a lot of English movies with subtitles. A few weeks later, I watched the movies without subtitles. This really helped me a lot. I developed my listening to understand different types of accents… accents of American, British, and Australian actors. Simultaneously, I practised all the reference books of the IELTS Cambridge series.

Shiraji supports the watching of English movies with subtitles in the beginning as a listening practice strategy to develop the input capacity of a variety of accents − mostly British, American, and Australian. Shiraji might be indicating extensive listening activities would help to attune learners' ears and could train the ear. Shiraji's notion can be connected to the necessity of extensive listening using a variety of patterns of listening such as narrow listening practice, classroom-based dictation, regular exposure to English language movies, or listening to materials on the web, TV, or the internet (Renandya & Hu, 2018). However, there has not been sufficient research on the effects of L2 extensive listening as a strategy for

listening comprehension improvement (Stephen et al., 2018). Shiraji also emphasised a specific type of reference book as a part of a strategic manoeuvre to prepare for the IELTS listening test.

Drinmoi and Ishmam, however, suggested improving spelling and handwriting, related to IELTS as a part of the preparation for the IELTS listening test. They said:

> Drinmoi: I want to share something on spelling. It was not enough for me to pick the words for answers. You have to write the word on the answer sheet. So, correct spelling is an issue. Handwriting is another issue for spelling. My trainers told me to write as intelligible as possible. If the spelling is not intelligible, you will not get marks for the correct answer. So, what I did…I wrote all the answer words in uppercase. It made my spelling more intelligible and helped reduce my spelling mistakes. I scored 7.5 on the listening test.
>
> Ishmam: Spelling mistakes are an issue to reduce marks in the IELTS listening test. Sometimes, a test-taker write the correct option but lose the marks for spelling mistake. So, the band score goes down.

Both Drinmoi and Ishmam emphasise correct spelling and clear handwriting of answer-word as a part of the IELTS test preparatory strategy. Their statements highlight that only understanding listening comprehension is not enough to do well in the IELTS listening test. So, although the IELTS listening test is the test to measure listening comprehension, it also measures candidates' phono-orthographic abilities. Drinmoi's reference to hand-writing further denotes that clear and intelligible handwriting is an issue for many test-takers to correctly represent their answer-word in the answer sheet. Otherwise, they might lose marks although they comprehend the listening questions well. As IELTS mandates that the test would "reflects real-life use of English" (Cullen et al., 2014, p. 2), it could be assumed that the spelling of the answer words for the listening test would not be archaic but the commonly used words on real-life topics.

Moreover, *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* also suggests that test-takers should be careful about their spelling mistakes. Often the name of a person or a place is spelled out but not the common content words, verbs, or adjectives that a test-taker is supposed to know before they appear in IELTS. As a part of a correct spelling assessment, a test taker needs to be able to recognise the letters of the English alphabet well and to differentiate between

letters and numbers when they listen to a text during the test (Cullen et al., 2014). However, although the correct spelling is needed for both pen and paper-based and computer-delivered test types, the necessity of clear handwriting is needed for only those who take the pen and paper-based IELTS test. At present, due to the ubiquitous influence of digitisation, there is a computer-delivered option for the IELTS test. However, this facility is not available in all 130+ countries yet where the test is conducted.

Himel, an experienced trainer, emphasises a strategy to develop three aspects of listening for better comprehension. He stated:

> The aspects of the English language such as vocabulary, accent, and pronunciation can be developed by listening more and more to the authentic English language.

Himel's use of the words "listening more and more" has a similar connotation to Ashek's statement indicating that the IELTS trainers put the preparatory students on a perpetual cycle of listening, answering, and checking answers which indicates the absence of teaching or preparing the students through the process of listening. However, research studies argue that explicit teaching of accent and pronunciation aspects helps bolster listeners' listening comprehension (Grant, 2014). Therefore, Himel's suggestion to practice listening to authentic English only might not be sufficient as a strategy to improve test-taker's listening comprehension.

Reflection on the strategies that emerged from the participants

The strategies that emerged from the participants' interviews indicate that preparatory test-takers had limited options for listening strategy use. The participants report that preparatory learners are taught some of the cognitive and metacognitive strategies of listening that are related to top-down skills but not bottom-up skills. Some trainers stated that offering direct instruction on the new words or keywords in the listening materials would augment test-taker's comprehension of the L2 spoken text. They suggested it would be done by teaching directly the difficult lexical terms during *pre-listening* activities or by asking students to preview the unfamiliar words before attending lessons.

A number of participants reported the use of top-down strategies for listening instruction. However, since Bangladeshi IELTS preparatory students have limited listening knowledge, a more bottom-up approach to listening instruction could help them improve their linguistic knowledge for listening comprehension, resulting in better decoding skills of spoken text

boundaries and increasing their phono-orthographic knowledge. Research studies (Renandya, 2012; Vandergrift, 2004) also argue that if the students are weak or at the beginning level of their listening fluency, a little chunk of spoken text would be processed automatically in their working memory. Their working memory might be busy processing bits and pieces of spoken texts consciously rather than focusing on relevant background knowledge, contextual factors, and other aural clues to help them to predict the implied meaning. Therefore, their comprehension suffers initially before applying any top-down strategies for better listening comprehension. Research also avers that learners sometimes miss opportunities to apply background knowledge because their focus is entirely on trying to decode and parse the speech stream (Renandya, 2012; Vandergrift & Goh, 2009).

Moreover, Field (2008a) also highlighted that knowing the nuances of textual aspects of oral input such as elisions and stress patterns of function words is important for the comprehension of intermediate listeners. So, the teaching of suprasegmental aspects of the English language as a part of the listening strategy is important as a part of improving students' bottom-up skills for better listening comprehension. Research also suggests that the teaching of listening strategies is not useful for learners with lower proficiency in the English language as they might struggle with word recognition problems of spoken text (Renandya, 2012).

The participants also have reported that listening strategies attribute to listening proficiency positively, but not always, and all types of strategies were not equally effective for all the preparatory students. The participants have reported that all four parts of the IELTS listening test require different listening strategies as each part is aimed at assessing different listening comprehension skills. The learners need to know the strategies to process spoken language according to their needs and purposes in different tasks. Research also claims that strategies do not directly influence listening proficiency and it cannot be said with a degree of certainty that the use of listening strategies leads to an increase in listening proficiency (Renandya, 2012). However, Brown argues, "strategies help organise learning and allow learners to out-perform their current competence, to compensate for things they don't know" (p. 152).

From the statements of the participants, it is evident that there is no cycle of *pre-while-post* listening practice as an enhancement to the listening comprehension strategy for the IELT preparatory students. A number of participants reported that they taught listening strategies focusing mainly on increasing the score of the listening test in IELTS. Brown (2011) states that there is a positive correlation between strategy use and scores of listening

comprehension. Therefore, it may be argued that the teaching of listening strategies with the intention of improving the language is absent in the preparatory course of IELTS.

Discussion on emergent themes of this chapter

A range of participants has reported that IELTS preparatory students face difficulty in their listening comprehension. The comprehension difficulties occur due to different cognitive and metacognitive listening factors. These factors include the speed of speech, unfamiliarity with L1 pronunciation, accent variation, the phono-orthographic variance of a word resulting in spelling errors, lack of background knowledge and topic familiarity, task types, and limited vocabulary range.

A number of participants have reported that there was a difference between the difficulties that Bangladeshi preparatory students confronted and the sequential list of perceived difficulties identified by Wang and Renandya (2012). However, three aspects of comprehension difficulties were found similar to the list but in a different order from Buck (2001) and Stepanovienė (2012) (Appendix N). Among the most difficult reasons for listening difficulties, the participants highlighted vocabulary issues, speed of speech, unfamiliar accents, and unknown topics.

Inadequate L2 vocabulary knowledge in the speech stream was identified as the most difficult barrier to comprehend listening tasks in the IELTS test by Bangladeshi preparatory students. Moreover, an important point, identified by several participants, is that students with a low-proficiency level in English face a problem with unfamiliar words in listening comprehension not only because of their limited vocabulary range but also because of their inability to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words correctly and quickly. Although some of the IELTS preparatory course trainers identified the value of a wide range of vocabulary, they did not report that they taught vocabulary to their students either as a word list or as a "phrasal chunk" (Williams, 2017) which could help students learn common collocations and expressions of English as a single unit.

The participants have further reported a phoneme-grapheme problem for word recognition in the spoken text although they might know the words in reading comprehension. The processing nature of spoken texts is different from the processing of written texts. In spoken texts, the information through words is conveyed through sound, which further requires an understanding of the phonetics of the language. Again, often there is a considerable phonological modification of the spoken words (such as assimilation, elision, and vowel

reduction) which requires a knowledge of the phonology of the language. Nonetheless, unlike written texts, spoken texts must be processed in real-time and listeners cannot control the speech delivery timing. So, a listener must be fast and efficient to be with the speaker's pace of delivery for better comprehension. Walker (2014) argues that the difference in words between their pronunciation and their appearance is one of the major problems of listening comprehension. The IELTS trainers also talked about the need for vocabulary knowledge for listening comprehension. If a student possesses a sufficient level of vocabulary knowledge, it helps them in pre-listening activities resulting in better listening comprehension (Madani & Kheirzadeh, 2018).

Another major problem identified by the participants is the speed of speech. When the IELTS preparatory students listen to English as a non-native, they have deficiencies in bottom-up processing that involve mainly word recognition skills (such as fast speed, accent variation, phoneme-grapheme disconnect, elision, assimilation anxiety) and inadequate L2 vocabulary knowledge in the speech stream. Problems with listening difficulties varied from participant to participant depending on their level of language proficiency and in terms of task difficulties. It might be argued that a major cause is an overemphasis on grammatical features of the aural texts by the participants and more reliance on bottom-up skills and working memory rather than using top-down skills and long-term memory.

The third problem related to listening comprehension is accent variation and the participants have reported that Bangladeshi preparatory students are not familiar with different varieties of English accents apart from Bangladeshi English accents. The IELTS preparatory students have little exposure to authentic input of speech. Their exposure to the English language is mostly confined to the Bangla-speaking IELTS trainers. Although there is a controversy to considering the Englishes mainly of UK, Australia, USA, Canada, and New Zealand as *authentic English* language input and listening to *authentic English* to improve the IELTS-related listening, the issue of authenticity of the English language has been one of the controversial issues in the teaching of listening (Rost, 2016). The Bangladeshi preparatory students lack exposure to approved accents used by *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* (Cullen et al., 2014) in the listening test. Thus, some trainers suggested the need to use supplementary authentic listening materials abundant with these speech features of English for focused practice.

The fourth reason for the difficulty of comprehending the aural texts in the IELTS listening test identified by several participants is *unknown topics*. Richards (2015) argues that topic

knowledge is related to listeners' meta-cognitive knowledge. The lack of meta-cognitive knowledge affects their listening comprehension. The role of background knowledge and schemata is highlighted for better listening proficiency. The use of background knowledge also facilitates faster processing of aural texts (Vandergrift & Goh, 2009). The participants also reported that the aural texts with topics unknown to the preparatory students increased anxiety, resulting in weak listening comprehension. Research studies have pointed out that stress is associated with listening: this is because teachers' emphasis is more on the product rather than the process of listening (Vandergrift, 2013; Vandergrift & Goh, 2009), and stress creates a high level of anxiety that is not conducive to learners to learn the process of listening comprehension. So, the use of socio-affective strategies can play a positive role to reduce learners' test anxiety and stress to improve their listening comprehension during the test (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

The majority of the participants identified the listening questions related to sections 3 and 4 as presenting task difficulty, and a small group of participants reported that questions related to section 2 were the most difficult for them to answer. Some of the trainers emphasised that IELTS preparatory students are required to use not only the bottom-up process but also the top-down process of listening comprehension to deal with the tasks of sections 3 and 4. From the report of several participants, it is evident that students need the synergy of both bottom-up and top-down processes for better listening fluency in the IELTS listening test.

The participants also have proposed a range of strategies to deal with the difficulties in answering different types of tasks and answering the relevant questions. Several participants have identified that there is less explicit focus than required for the preparatory students on phoneme-grapheme correspondences to overcome their listening issues related to accent and spelling. So, the teaching of pronunciation for improving different suprasegmental aspects is needed for preparatory students (Grant, 2014). Research also suggested auditory training (Brown, 2011). This training includes how to train the ears to attune speech features and sound distinctions that do not exist in the L1. This is because when students are taught speech sounds, word stress, reductions, and connected speech, they are also learning how to decode the speech stream and segment it into recognisable words that can help them achieve better listening comprehension (Brown, 2011). Otherwise, "It is not surprising that training in cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies does not improve understanding when learners do not know, or cannot recognize, the words they are reading or hearing and how they are put together" (Swan & Walter, 2017, p. 231).

Research studies on listening comprehension strategy related to vocabulary issues argue for teaching vocabulary before listening (Madani & Kheirzadeh, 2018; Zeeland, 2013) if a lack of vocabulary knowledge is the primary impediment to successful listening comprehension. Vocabulary is related to spelling mistakes, synonymous expressions, grammar, confidence, and stress reliever, and helps gain an overall understanding of the theme. *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* also suggests, "Studying all aspects of English (including vocabulary and grammar) will also help improve your IELTS score" (Cullen et al., 2014, p. 141).

From the statements of the participants, it is evident that there is little sign of teaching the bottom-up process of listening and linguistic features that are important for the low and average proficient students. However, the bottom-up skill instruction for better listening progress depends on the level of the listeners. Research studies claim that listeners with a lower proficiency level of listening benefit from the bottom-up-skill instruction as the basic block of listening fluency are related to their lack of word recognition skills in spoken texts (Renandya & Hu, 2018). This opinion was echoed by other researchers who talked about the necessity of teaching listening strategies according to students' proficiency levels. They suggested that for students who have a weak linguistic background or who have considerable difficulty in word recognition, the focus of listening instruction should be on enhancing students' bottom-up perception skills (Li & Renandya, 2012). Moreover, highly proficient listeners use more strategies in comparison to intermediate and low proficiency (Huang & Nisbet, 2019).

However, if the listeners can automatise the bottom-up linguistic processes, that will help free their working memory and provide them with more processing time to apply their metacognitive strategies related to the top-down approach for better listening comprehension (Yeldham, 2018). Nonetheless, there has been little research carried out so far about the types of activities that can enable learners to automatise their ability to recognise words in the spoken text (Vandergrift, 2013). Moreover, in recent research, Stephen et al. (2018) argue that rather than using the strategies to lead to an increase in listening proficiency, students should be provided with extensive aural input so that natural strategies could emerge from the listeners. On the other hand, for the students with intermediate or advanced-level listening proficiency, *bottom-up* process instruction might not be beneficial (Wang & Fan, 2015) and more *top-down* process instruction could be better for improving their listening proficiency.

A number of participants reported that they taught strategies after finding out what processes and strategies students need to deal with IELTS listening strategies. Some of the participants acknowledged that scoring in IELTS listening does not ensure one is a better listener in real life. Some of the preparatory students further reported that they did not get focused on listening for language learning in the IELTS preparatory course but to develop their listening skill to sit for the IELTS test and to get their required score on the listening test. Some of the trainers also reported that they engage the preparatory students in a lot of repeated listening by providing the same materials multiple times for listening. However, according to the research on listening (Renandya & Hu, 2018; Jack C. Richards, 2015), this is identified as the teaching of the *product of listening* not the teaching of the *process of teaching*. However, Renandya (2012) argues that repeated listening is beneficial for the listeners with a low level of proficiency by directly improving their word recognition skills for aural input and enabling them to focus more on their cognitive process of comprehension and inferencing. On the other hand, other researchers (such as Stephen et al., 2018) argue that listeners with higher language proficiency often emerge with natural strategies rather than be led by a strategy to increase listening proficiency. Therefore, the teaching of strategy instruction to the students for listening proficiency varies depending on the level of language proficiency of the preparatory students.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter presents a summary of findings from the study. The study has discussed the perceptions and experiences of policymakers and teachers about the expectations of the National Curriculum 2012 for English (VI- X) and what actually occurs in classrooms. The study has identified multiple disconnections between oral skills in curriculum, classroom teaching-learning process, and assessment. It also found that in secondary classrooms the English language is taught, largely, without attention to oral skills. The main reasons for this situation are the multiple disconnections between policy for English language teaching and the neglect of oral skills in practice, implementation of language policies without proper planning, untrained teachers, and lack of provision of classroom facilities such as lack of use of ICT for the practice of oral skills.

This chapter summarises the challenges in teaching listening skill and why it is absent in classroom practice and evaluation despite the introduction of the CLT approach in Bangladesh in the last two decades. It also summaries how policymakers could work to integrate listening into education and what tensions are involved in its current strategy. It then reviews how secondary teachers can overcome their technophobia and prepare themselves to use digital technology to support their instructional activities to teach listening in the language classroom.

It also reviews how to deal with the assessment challenges including listening in public examinations. In this regard, the study has looked into the IELTS test, and interviewed its preparatory students and trainers in Bangladesh. The IELTS test is one of the widely accepted language tests that is sometimes seen as a potential model for testing at the secondary level. The investigation has helped me to identify the comprehension challenges reported by the preparatory students of post-secondary and preparatory course trainers and strategies applied by the preparatory students. The findings from this phase of the study have explored that the post-secondary students who were preparing for the IELTS have faced challenges in listening comprehension for multiple reasons. The main sources of the difficulties for the students are their inability to recognise known words due to unfamiliarity with accents and speed, their lack of vocabulary knowledge while listening in IELTS, and sometimes the confusion caused by an unknown topic. This study suggests some strategies that the Bangladeshi students can follow to deal with their listening difficulties in preparing for IELTS listening skill. Finally, it

makes recommendations for policymakers, teachers' trainers, examination boards, and acknowledges my own learning throughout the research journey.

Policy and practice: Very good on paper

A number of researchers (Al Amin, 2017; Rasheed, 2017) in the context of Bangladesh have complained about the gap between the policy and practice of curriculum but only vaguely mentioned the role of listening skill in English language education. English is one of the compulsory subjects in the school curriculum in Bangladesh since Grade 1. Education policy identifies the English language as a tool for creating a knowledge-based society. English is not just a language to communicate; it has become a language to introduce the learners to the highway of global knowledge and world cultures. Due to the importance of the English language for its global need, both the National Education Policy 2010 and National Curriculum 2012 for English language education recognised the English language as a tool for economic growth, access to the global job market, and the production of skilled workforce in different jobs requirements. So, policy emphasised communicative competence in the language. However, if listening is a baseline from which to learn how to speak as well, in the present global context, a language learner needs to understand a wide variety of spoken Englishes from different parts of the world. So, a learner has to be attuned with a multi-variant listening competence. A learner should be a fluent listener to a variety of World Englishes to make a successful oral communication as he or she might need to exchange verbal communication with people from different countries. Effective communication is all about understanding what is being said, not just who says it.

Moreover, listening is important to learn a language and it has not been adequately taught or dealt with or examined and conceptualised. It might be argued that curriculum shapers have not even conceptualised how to teach listening. It is in the curriculum, but it has not been addressed practically so far. Since the inclusion of listening and speaking skills in the secondary curriculum and textbooks, the skills have not yet been effectively practised and assessed. It seems the policymakers put the cart before the horse. Therefore, the practice and assessment of listening both at the macro and micro levels of the curriculum reveal a huge gap. The lens of the curriculum is always a top-down approach in Bangladesh as the policymakers idealistically propose different policies without considering the reality on the ground. The policies regarding the development of listening skill is not an exception. Policymakers need to uncover the ground reality of listening skill in classroom practice and

assessment procedures in both rural and urban contexts. There is a gulf of differences between the policies and the practice of listening skill, secondary teachers' skills, notions of listening skill by the teachers and the students for language education, availability of materials, supportive environments, and technological assistance. For instance, although the policymakers and NCTB advise the teachers to follow the *English for Today* textbooks for listening and speaking practice, they have not provided the teachers with a booklet containing certain guidelines on how to do the activities in a classroom. They have not even included a sample question paper on assessing these two skills (Appendix I).

The policy-practice connection is contrary to the philosophical underpinning of the curriculum

Based on Dewey's educational philosophy, the curriculum for secondary English education is very good on paper. But it is not in practice! There is a Teachers' Curriculum Guide designed by NCTB for teachers. The Guide aims to make teachers aware of the philosophy of the curriculum and its goals so that teachers can generate the teaching-learning process according to the curriculum. Based on Dewey's educational philosophy, the curriculum adopted a policy for secondary classes to promote learning through practice and interaction so that a student cannot only connect the classroom learning to his/her schema but also can apply that new learning in real-life situations. However, due to the disconnection between policy and practice, most of the secondary students fail to achieve competence in both oral and orthographic forms of the English language for their practical needs. Considering the perceived difficulties in putting into practice the expectations of CLT and what the English language situation in Bangladesh allows, it can be concluded that CLT-related problems need to be resolved if CLT is to be successfully implemented in EFL contexts.

The communicative approach needs to lead the learners to express their ideas and feelings in English. In this regard, task completion, opinion sharing, information transfer, information gathering, and problem-solving are some significant CLT classroom activities that should be designed in the lesson plan. Therefore, for the implementation of listening skill both in the classroom and in assessment procedures, the country also needs to consider a bottom-up approach along with a top-down approach to the curriculum. Before formulating any policy, the government or the relevant body on behalf of the government should do a verification check to see whether the ground is ready to receive and execute the policy. To do the process, the government may collect data from field-level institutions. Then, according to what they

find, they can make policies and while implementing those policies, the government may include the headteachers and the teachers from local-level institutions in planning the implementation. The local headteachers and the teachers should be engaged to assist the government in every step of the execution of the policy. Later on, if there is any need for a change in the policy, the Government may take feedback from the implementers and according to the requirements, they may revise or formulate a new policy to reimplement. So, connections between the policymakers and the ground stakeholders are crucial to facilitate listening in classroom practice and assessment. Figure 14 demonstrates the gaps between the problems of policy, practice, assessment, and the need for oral skills and more specifically, listening skill for English language proficiency in the country.

It is also observed that the gap between the policy and practice of implementing oral skills are at least partly due to the lack of resourcing and monitoring. Policymakers often say that policies are great, but it is teachers who are not motivated to implement the policy in their practice. However, they are not concerned with the resource restrictions of the teachers in implementing the listening practice in a classroom. Although one of the policymakers reported that monitoring is needed to check the implementation of the policies, it has been rarely done. Moreover, the policymakers also have not demarcated the urban-rural contextual issues and differences in implementing oral skills in a secondary classroom as statistics (Alamgir, 2018) showed that most of the schools in Bangladesh are in rural areas. So, many English teachers in rural areas have no clear concept of the CLT approach. Policymakers need to talk to the teachers of rural schools about the CLT implementation as they are the major stakeholders on the ground. They need to find out what the teachers know about CLT and the challenges they face in implementation, why or why not CLT is used or avoided in classroom teaching.

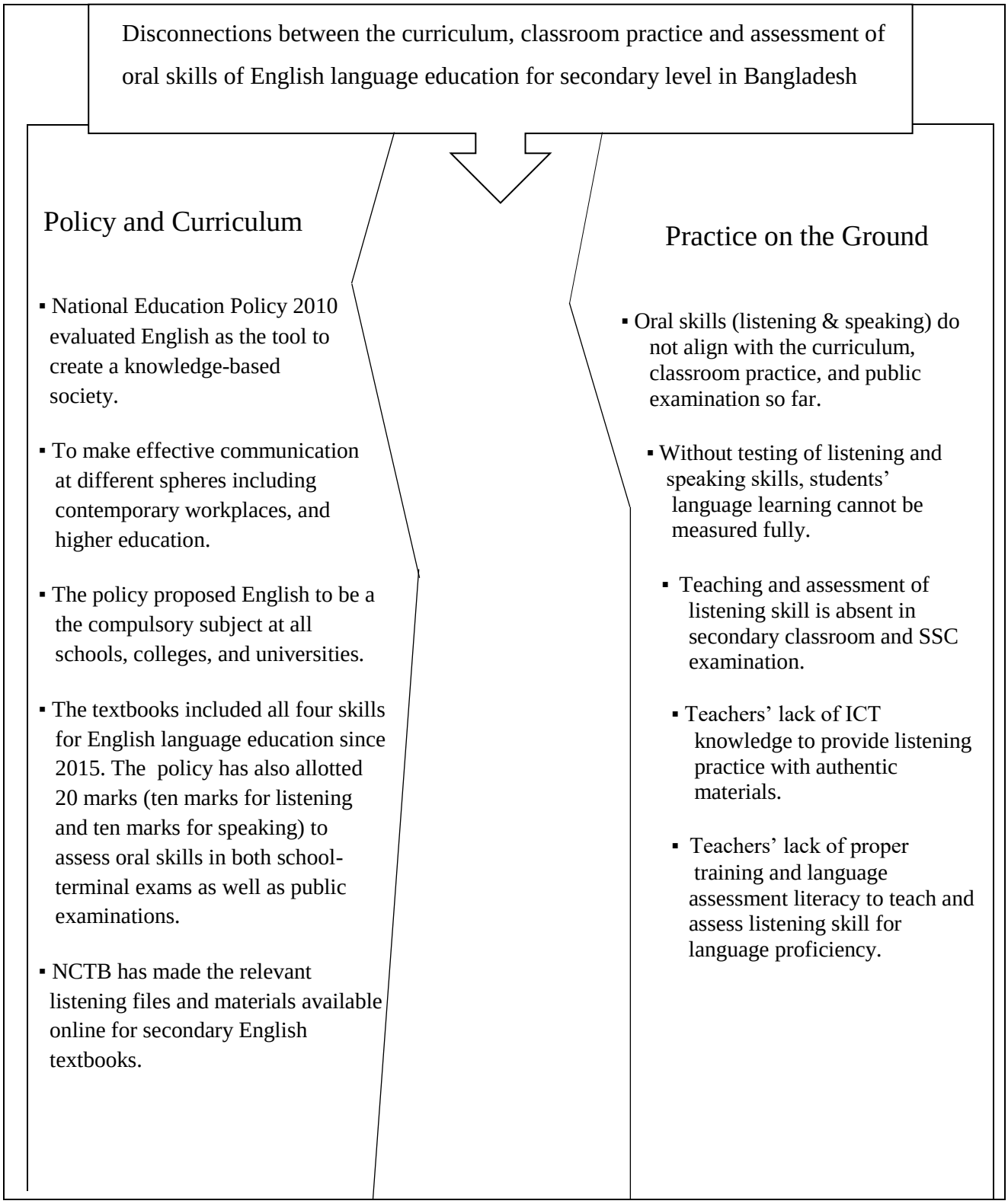

Figure 14. Existing disconnections between curriculum policy and practice for secondary English education

Reflection on CLT

There is no *one size fits all* approach or *quick-fix* solution to teaching a language. The CLT approach is one of the many approaches to language teaching. Over the last fifty years, CLT has emerged as a dominant language teaching approach. CLT has created a wide range of opportunities for language teachers to come up with innovative and more effective ways to teach languages in the current context. With time, there have been several extensions of CLT. For example, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). In fact, both CLT and TBLT are very similar to each other in essence. Both concepts hold that a language should be learned in ways based on how to use it in real life. As I look back on the data and discussion of the study, I am convinced that it is possible to use the CLT approach effectively. It needs to be applied completely as a whole in the classroom (integrated with four skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing), not piecemeal. In the context of Bangladesh, CLT has not been applied so far as a complete package in the classroom. However, in Bangladesh, the implementation of CLT requires customisation to align with the contextual realities. So, an eclectic approach to CLT can be applied. It may further require contextual research about CLT mainly related to language teachers and language teaching to know how to tailor the CLT approach to the local contexts (both urban and rural). Both policymakers and teachers can negotiate to make the required contextually adaptable changes to use CLT for effective English teaching to secondary students.

The absence of communicative teaching culture in a classroom

The teachers in my study emphasised the need for contextual customisation of the CLT approach to English language teaching at the secondary level in Bangladesh. My own experience with CLT and many of the arguments in published research studies agree with this need. However, the findings of this study also indicate that the method has not yet been implemented completely with the application of all four language skills in English language education. The teachers and a range of research evidence emphasise that CLT is an applied way of teaching a language but question whether the Western model of CLT in the EFL context can be shifted directly to the Bangladeshi context. It is important to think not simply about which teaching methodology is the *best*, but rather which is the best suited for specific social and academic needs in a context. In a recent study, Macfarlane, Macfarlane, and Gillon (2015) argue that western concepts and frameworks are based on strong theoretical bases, but cannot always be transferred to a different context and culture.

The current study also found that the CLT approach has not been functioning well so far in English language classrooms. There is also a lack of teaching oral language skills for English language education. One of the reasons is the absence of a communicative culture, not only in language classrooms but also within the classroom context of Bangladesh for other subjects.

Secondary teachers in this study welcomed the inclusion of oral skills and acknowledged the necessity of oral skills for language competency. Oral skills motivate students to learn English and enable the classes to work in an interactive mode. This communicative classroom culture also allows the students to explore their learning problems, and discuss what causes a problem to them and what might be done about those problems to facilitate their learning. So the presence of a communicative culture is needed to create a communicative space that can facilitate learning in a classroom. Teachers actually need to *talk to the students* rather than *talk at the students* in a classroom.

But listening competence is needed

Schmidt (2016) has argued that throughout the history of language learning, most students have never been taught how to listen to a second language. Although many language teaching methods are based on listening proficiency either directly or implicitly (e.g. Direct method, Audio-Lingual method, Silent Way, Total Physical Response, and Communicative Language Teaching method), the development of listening skill is still underused in achieving English language proficiency by the teachers and researchers. However, nowadays, both in academic and non-academic contexts, listening comprehension is at the centre of language learning. So, the understanding of listening skill is important for the Bangladeshi context. However, this study has reported that students lack English language oral competence even after studying the English language for 12 years. Students also struggle with the preparation for the IELTS listening test when they take the preparatory course after their higher secondary education. Some of the participants of the study also reported that there is actually no process of language learning in secondary classrooms, no matter whether the language of instruction *Bangla* or *English.* The central argument in this study is that the development of students' language proficiency through a communicative culture in schools should be the responsibility of teachers of all subjects. The development of such a culture has practical implications for schools, curriculum development, and teacher education. Therefore, it is time to understand that the development of students' language proficiency comes through the repertoire of active listening not only to improve the English or Bangla language but also to achieve the learning

of the other subjects at the secondary level. So, improving listening skill is important for secondary English language proficiency and all subjects across the curriculum in school. In line with this concept, Beacco et al. (2015) also suggested that mastery of the language in school is essential for developing in learners those skills that are necessary for school success and critical thinking. It is fundamental for participation in democratic societies, for social inclusion and cohesion.

Listening fluency can create a workforce capable of communicating in English to fill an economic need

As discussed previously, listening skill precedes speaking skill and helps gain overall oral competence in a language. Due to the lack of oral competence in the English language, graduating students faced problems in getting a job both in the Bangladesh job market and abroad. Without the ability to listening comprehension, it is difficult for someone to understand and interpret something that is said to him/her. Recently, in a media debate, one of the renowned entrepreneurs (Nasir, 2018) pointed out that there are hundreds of thousands of foreigners from 44 different countries working in Bangladesh in diverse sectors ranging from the garments industry to tourism and health sectors. Apart from their professional skills in their respective jobs, they are outpacing Bangladeshis in their English communicative competence. Even though Bangladeshis may have similar expertise for the job,− they are not employed because of their lack of oral competency in English. Therefore, the country needs to equip job seekers with need-based English language competence to serve in the local and global job market to compete in a variety of job sectors as well as for access to higher education and training. This need has also been highlighted in the goals of both the National Education policy and the National Curriculum for English language education. So, to improve the overall oral competence of English language education, the achievement of listening competence should be given the top priority.

Listening as a skill needs to cohere with the curriculum

As far as listening skill is concerned in the context of Bangladesh, the problem is complex. Listening is still a handicap for Bangladeshi secondary language learners though it seems a skill not hard to handle. My investigation has revealed that there is a problem between the Bangladeshi context and Biggs's (2014) Curriculum Alignment (CA) model, in that there is a non-alignment of teaching and assessment of the intended learning of the students for listening skill in Bangladesh. Biggs's CA model starts with the outcomes that students are

supposed to learn, and their learning is supposed to align with the teaching and assessment of those learning outcomes. However, there is a lack of coherence between the curriculum, classroom practice, and assessment of English language education for secondary levels in Bangladesh. The assessment regime needs to be thought out before the teaching and learning activities. This is because for students, assessment defines what is important in the curriculum and they will learn what they think will be assessed. On the other hand, the context of Bangladesh is reverse to the CA model as listening is neither taught by the teachers nor learned for language learning by the students, and it is not assessed by the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education. However, my investigation has also revealed that despite the difficulties in teaching and assessing listening skill, teachers have reported that listening practice for language learning can play a vital role by making the learners more engaged and interactive in a classroom.

Underlying realities of the teaching of listening

Although in the history of language education in Bangladesh different types of teaching methods have been tried so far including CLT, the development of listening skill is still underused in achieving English language proficiency by the policymakers, teachers, and students. In this study, the policymakers, secondary teachers, IELTS preparatory students, and IELTS trainers reported the realities of teaching listening skill at the secondary level and the IELTS preparatory course. The participants reported the teaching processes, aspects of listening difficulties, assessment, and institutional challenges of listening in Bangladesh. The findings indicate that it is important to focus on the process of listening rather than only on the product of listening.

Only practice of listening but no teaching of listening in a classroom

The study has found that secondary teachers often do not get an opportunity to focus on listening skill in the classroom teaching of English. However, when the secondary teachers do listening practice, they just focus on practising the listening exercises of the *English for Today* textbook, either from online materials and/or sometimes from their readout of the listening text. It means that the focus is only on the product of listening but not on the process of listening. The intention has been to practise the listening exercises given in the textbooks to check whether students could answer the relevant gap-filling exercise but not to teach them listening for aural fluency and overall language proficiency. Although some urban teachers have tried to teach grammar, vocabulary, tense, etc. through the listening skill to make the

class communicative to follow the CLT approach (the approach prescribed by NCTB), they do not focus on the process of listening either, rather they focus on the product of listening. However, a number of participants reported that students would make better progress in pronunciation if they just repeatedly practise the same listening text. The different phases of listening practice (pre-while-post listening phases) proposed by the researchers (Richards, 2015) are missing in the teaching of listening in secondary English language classrooms. Some of the teachers suggested that the practice of the listening skill in the classroom can promote collaborative learning (both pair and group works) as well as task-based language teaching (TBLT) which is also considered a branch of CLT and can work in a customised context for language teaching and learning. However, this field requires further research in the secondary context of Bangladesh.

Difficulty factors in listening comprehension and how to deal with them

The IELTS chapter of the study helped me to explore the potential difficulties of listening comprehension for the post-secondary Bangla-medium students. The experience of the students and the trainers from the IELTS preparatory course helped me learn the relevant listening difficulties and the means and strategies to deal with those difficulties. As the participants reported, the low range of vocabulary of the students is the major barrier to listening comprehension. Word recognition in the spoken text is the main difficulty for Bangladeshi language learners to increase the pace of listening comprehension. Phonetic variation of a word misleads them (e.g. reduction, assimilation, elision, cliticization, resyllabification). Sometimes, learners knew the word in written form but not the oral version, and sometimes due to their low vocabulary range, they could not follow the spoken text. The study also has found that the Bangla-medium students are not familiar with the accents of inner-circle countries as they are used to receiving the monolithic accent of Bangladeshi English speakers. The study also has found that the speed of the speech has been another major problem for the difficulty of listening comprehension. It is because they lacked input with a natural flow from the authentic spoken texts of English.

In Bangladesh, potential IELTS test-takers face the listening skill test for the first time, as there is no listening comprehension test included in the Secondary or Higher Secondary education in Bangladesh. Although NCTB has included listening skill for English language education since 2015, listening skill has not been tested and still, there are misconceptions about teaching and learning of listening skill to improve English language proficiency for the

learners of secondary and higher secondary levels. Those who try for IELTS after their higher secondary education in Bangladesh face a listening comprehension test for the first time. However, they only prepare themselves to score for the IELTS listening test. Therefore, they just practice listening and have been prepared for listening by testing. They are not prepared by the IELTS listening preparatory course for the general skills of listening. Although some of the secondary teachers and IELTS trainers accentuated the concept of teaching both 'listening to learn' and 'learning to listen' for listening fluency and language proficiency, both the concepts are missing in the process of teaching listening skill in secondary English education in Bangladesh. So, both the teachers and trainers are not well-aware of the application of different listening strategies according to the need of both low and high proficient language learners.

Moreover, the IELTS preparatory test-takers had limited options for developing listening strategies. In the preparatory course, they have not been taught strategies to improve their listening skill but only to answer the question in the IELTS listening test. So, the focus of teaching strategies is on the metacognitive aspects of listening rather than cognitive aspects, whereas research has argued that without knowing cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies do not help listeners for better listening comprehension. So, the current study argues that learners should receive foundational aspects of cognitive strategies first before metacognitive strategies and that they could then use the former in any situation according to their listening requirement. As a part of teaching listening strategies, both the teachers and trainers need to teach micro and macro skills of listening following *Bottom-up* and *Top-down* processes considering the experiences, goals, and abilities of the students, such as secondary students and post higher secondary students.

Training needed for Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Language teachers cannot be assumed to be a sage on the stage just to transmit language-related knowledge. A language teacher should act as a coach; one who helps students understand the roadmap of language learning tasks in front of them. They should keep the students motivated and guide them to learn how to pursue the language proficiency tasks on their own using both in-class resources and activities and out-of-class materials and digital resources available on the internet. Therefore, the teachers need training at regular intervals for their Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Existing research has reported that there is no pre-service teachers' training program for secondary teachers in Bangladesh.

However, the study found that many secondary teachers are left without any in-service training for inducting them into the CLT approach to apply in the classroom. Others only received training in English language education once in their 10-15 years of teaching life. Moreover, the tenure of these training programs lasts only a few weeks. For example, the training programme named ELTIP was 13-day long, the training programme under Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQISEP) was 21-day long, and the training programme named English for Teaching; Teaching for English (ETTE) was also 21 days only. These training programmes, with the support of the Government of Bangladesh, have been centred on improving teachers' language skills and the techniques they need for the effective delivery of materials to large classes. Karim et al. (2018) help me claim that, despite all these training programmes, when 75% of secondary teachers stay away from the basic training on English language education, it is doubtful if the practice of CLT can take place in classrooms. Moreover, my study found that there is no separate training for the teachers on developing their skills to teach the skills of oracy, although Shohel and Banks (2012) argued that a training programme named English in Action (EIA) designed a set of 12 activity modules to improve teachers' listening and speaking skills with the help of mobile technology. However, my study questioned whether any of the training programmes can be identified as a part of the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework [23] as it requires two stages of training − pre-training and professional education for in-service training to achieve the ultimate goal of teachers' professional competence. The secondary English teachers have not received these two stages of training to develop their professional competence. Therefore, the available training has not been significantly successful for the secondary teachers so far in terms of practising listening and speaking skills, let alone teaching the skills. As the findings of the study have reported, the training programmes usually follow a top-down approach where the teachers' are not asked to suggest what they need from the training for their professional and pedagogical developments. So, I suggest that it is high time to incorporate trainees' narratives and personal experiences as part of pre-service and in-service training programmes for their Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

[23] It is a planned, continuous and lifelong process whereby teachers try to develop their personal and professional qualities to improve their knowledge.

Producing a cohort of teachers with pedagogical knowledge and ICT literacy

The current study has explored the need for a cohort of teachers with pedagogy and ICT knowledge. Despite the fact that Bangladesh has made tremendous progress in ICT service and infrastructure, the country still lags behind in incorporating ICT tools to support English language practice in the classroom. Using a computer or multimedia does not mean the integration of technology in teaching. For example, if a secondary teacher just plays something on multimedia, and prints out the exercise sheets of that topic and tells the students to work on a fill-in-the-blank activity, it cannot be called technology-integrated teaching of language. The study found that there is not only a scarcity of ICT training for the teachers but also that a culture of technophobia exists in the mind of the teachers. The study emphasised the need for ICT training with the integration of teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skill development. The study also argued that the use of ICT with proper pedagogical knowledge can augment the communicative culture of the classroom for student-centred learning. Students learn more effectively if they actively participate in the learning process than if they only passively follow the teacher's instructions. Students who actively take advantage of out-of-class study and practice opportunities will make much more long-term progress than students who consider them a chore to deal with as quickly as possible. Moreover, the cohort of teachers with training in pedagogy and ICT literacy can apply different theoretical models of ICT based on learning in secondary classrooms such as TPACK. Furthermore, English as a second language is mostly taught in low-resource classrooms, especially in developing and under-developed countries including Bangladesh. So, secondary English teachers need to be able to manage a class with a huge number of students, both in urban and rural schools. With the combined knowledge of pedagogy and ICT, secondary teachers may be able to facilitate both listening practice and teaching of listening and assessment for language learning. A trilogy of teachers' pedagogical skills of teaching listening, their linguistic skills, and the ICT knowledge of the English teachers is needed to practice listening materials to their fullness for language proficiency during the class. It can also create opportunities for the teachers to enable the learners to be more engaged and interactive in a classroom.

Possible Measures

The findings of the study suggest a number of recommendations of what can be done in the classroom by the teachers if they have been trained in pedagogy and ICT literacy in English language education.

1. As the duration of time for English classes is insufficient, teachers can expose the students to authentic interactions of English through audio-visual input to improve their vocabulary, syntactic knowledge, accent, pronunciation, and different grammatical aspects in a communicative way to improve their listening skill for the overall improvement of their English competence. Furthermore, some social interaction activities should take place in classrooms, such as conversation, role-play, problem-solving, discussion, dialogue, and jigsaw. These activities are very effective in CLT activities, which should also be practised in the lessons.

2. As the government's prime focus is to make all the classrooms supported by multimedia and to provide Wi-Fi for all the rural and urban secondary schools by 2021, the concept of a *flipped classroom* can be adopted to overcome the challenges of a large classroom and time constraint issue for authentic English input and to bridge language learning both in-home and school simultaneously.

Headteachers need to lead from the front

The study explored that headteachers' traditional mindset about the teaching and learning process is one of the barriers to making a communicative culture and to promoting secondary teachers to apply the knowledge they gain through CLT-based teaching in their classrooms. So, there is a need for more training to update the headteachers with the current tide of the curriculum implementation. The training should help the headteachers to emerge as the teacher of learning to lead from the front to motivate fellow teachers for their Continuous Professional Development (CPD). So there is a need to form a connective chain (Figure 15) in the implementation process where headteachers are a vital part of bringing the change. The research of Salahuddin (2016) also demonstrated that headteachers are the spearheads to initiate change in an institute. However, in Bangladesh, many headteachers do not distribute their powers to the teachers and create opportunities for the teachers to make decisions about classroom activities in enhancing teaching and students' learning. Nonetheless, initiatives may come from the teachers as well where they can convince the headteachers to make strategic changes for better learning outcomes in a classroom. So, responsibility needs to be taken to bring change to the existing condition.

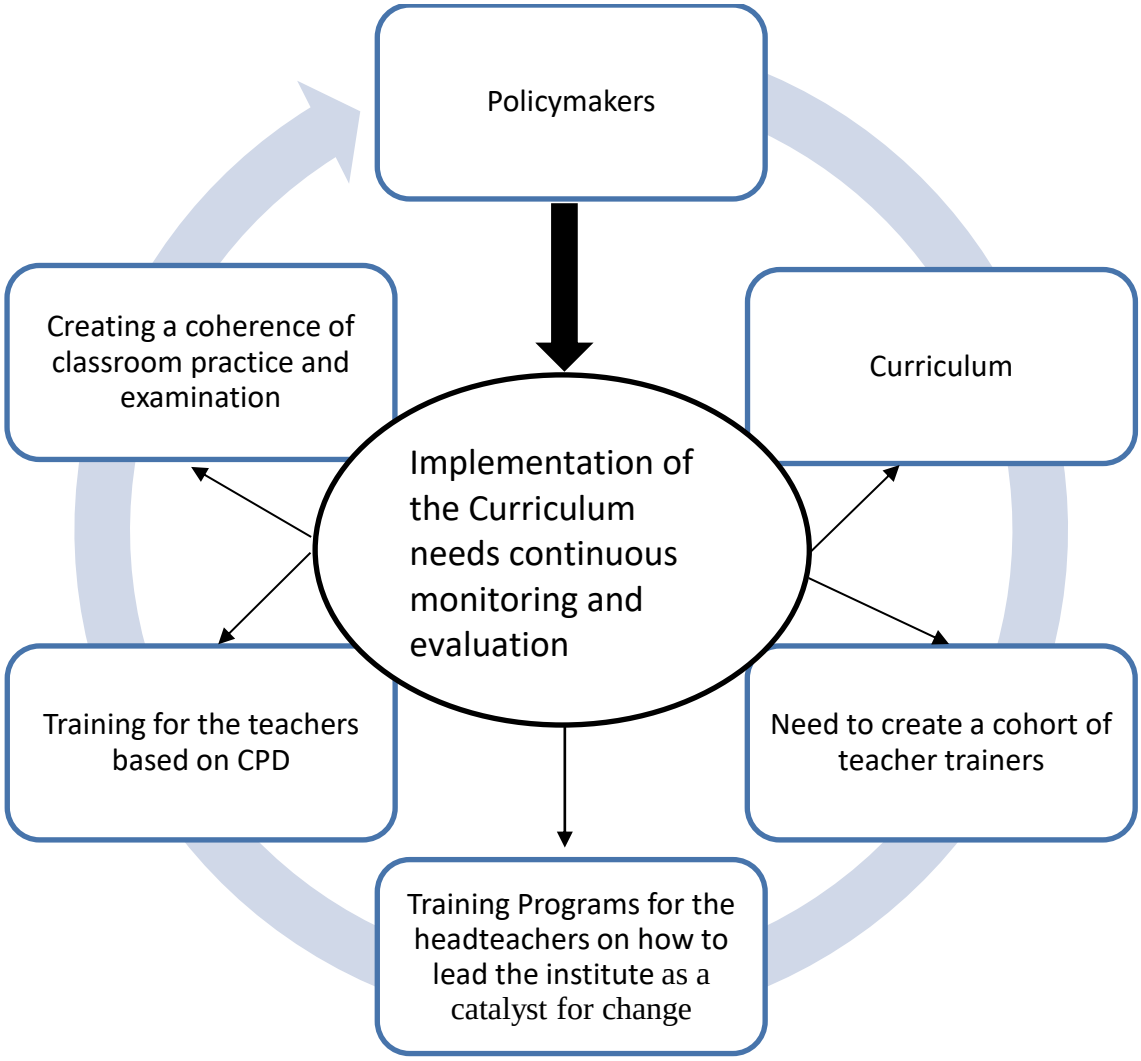

Figure 15. The required chain of actions for implementing the curriculum effectively

The dominance of exam-driven pedagogy

The current study reported that the existing exam-culture emphasis on examination compels students and teachers to focus on the areas, which are relevant to the examination. The examination system has directed the absence of listening practice in the classroom. Apart from a few students, most of the students are not interested in the practice of listening, as it is not included in the examination. The students intend to get good marks in the examination regardless of achieving real competence in the English language. Several teachers in the study highlighted that they have initiated the listening practice in the classrooms. However, they found that students are interested in only practising oral skills for the test, not in improving their English skills. As listening skill is not part of the assessment process in either school-based terminal exams or public examinations, students are not interested in practising

listening. In addition, the intention of the teachers is to test the listening of the students rather than teach them listening for aural fluency and overall language proficiency.

A linkage between teaching and assessment is needed to facilitate listening practice for language proficiency. Moreover, as listening and speaking are considered oral-based language skills requiring extempore performance, the measuring of these two skills in assessments may reduce the culture of rote memorisation in language learning in secondary English education. The current assessment of English language education is paper-based as it measures only the reading and writing skills of English resulting in students developing rote memorisation without thinking about the need for real-life language competence which the country so desperately requires from its English language education. We should remember that language learning requires a rich array of communicative skills, only some of which can be tested. There is a need for a trilogy of teachers' pedagogical skills for teaching listening and speaking: their linguistic proficiency, knowledge of how to assess oral skills, and ICT knowledge in order to use listening materials to their fullest during the class.

Reducing the fear of unfairness in listening assessment

My understanding is that we can only estimate the output of listening capacity from a person's response. The response can come in two ways − either by a verbal response or completing a task followed by an instruction from the speaker. Nonetheless, we cannot exactly measure one's ability to listen. I quote Chomsky (2015) in support of my understanding. He said, "The assessment itself is completely artificial. It's not ranking teachers in accordance with their ability to help develop children who will reach their potential, and explore their creative interests. Those things you're not testing. It's a rank that's mostly meaningless. And the very ranking itself is harmful. It's turning us into individuals who devote our lives to achieving a rank. Not into doing things that are valuable and important" (p. 1). The research of Vandergrift and Goh (2009) noted that listening processes are difficult to verify empirically, and as noted in earlier chapters, these processes interact in complex ways with different types of knowledge and, in the end, comprehension can only be inferred based on task completion given by a speaker. More introspective studies are required to explore what motivates the listener to respond to task requirements, and how the listener variables, task-types, knowledge-types, and listening processes interact in determining listeners' responses.

As an English language teacher for more than a decade, I agree with the anecdotal as well as the professional viewpoint of Brown (2011) who studied and learned several languages and still believe that listening is hard and challenging, not only in teaching it in a classroom but also for everyday interaction. Moreover, interactive listening has been neglected in research about listening. In the IELTS, there is actually testing of listening through practice, not the teaching of listening for English language proficiency. The students were the passive receivers of the listening practice as they were not taught the process of listening, but they practised the product of listening.

Another fairness issue is related to the assessment of listening skill both in school and public examinations. The current study has found fears that if there is a school-based assessment of listening skill in public examination, the marks will be sent to the Education Boards with similar results to the assessment of lab-based practical science education. The teachers may manipulate the assessment procedure for marking. Another possibility of unfairness might be related to headteachers. The study recorded reports that some of the headteachers allocate marks for listening skill using the written marks on a pro-rata basis without assessing listening in the school. Another issue may arise due to the urban-rural divide. The teachers in rural schools may not be able to assess listening skill properly, resulting in the causes of giving low marks to the students. On the other hand, there is also the possibility that as the teachers in rural schools may not know how to assess; they may provide full marks allotted for the listening assessment. If this happens, this might be an injustice to the students in urban schools where they are likely to be assessed in a better way and may suffer from getting low marks in comparison to their rural counterparts. So, the better option is to set up a separate moderation body comprising of the officials of the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE), teacher trainers, and the secondary teachers to conduct and assess both listening and speaking skills. The body can conduct and assess the oral skills for the public examination in the language labs that are available in some regions and some that are in the process of being set up in the different regions in the country. Initially, it might be difficult to assess the huge number of secondary students − 12,197,554 students in 29,330 secondary level educational institutions – general, vocational, and madrasas – across the country ("Secondary education in Bangladesh:" 2019). However, it could be achieved if properly planned and executed step by step from Grade 6 to 10.

Methodological innovation

This study makes a useful contribution to knowledge because of its Methodological approach. To my knowledge, this is the first time a corpus-based thematic analysis approach has been applied in the field of English language education research in the Bangladeshi context. This type of methodological approach helped me answer the research questions pragmatically using both qualitative and quantitative data according to the need for research questions. It can be assumed that my use of this methodology may encourage other researchers in the country to do similar qualitative research studies complemented by a quantitative description.

The Contribution of this study to new knowledge

This study has acknowledged and carefully examined global concepts and strategies for teaching language. It has also examined the local Bangladeshi context in which the English language is taught. It argues for the need to consider what can be learned from global expertise, however, at the same time to ensure that any goals and strategies that are adopted should be well adapted to the conditions of Bangladesh. The study has examined the perceived difficulties of listening comprehension in classroom teaching in Bangladesh. The study identifies disconnections between the expectations of policies and the grounded reality of what teachers experience in English language education. It then examined and affirmed the necessity of solid listening fluency in English for overall language proficiency. It further identifies challenges facing both policy and practice and made recommendations to reduce problems and facilitate the teaching of listening in the classroom.

It has been argued that not all the students in different EFL contexts would experience a similar sequence of difficulty factors in the teaching and learning of listening for English language education. Buck's (2001) research ranked the listening comprehension difficulties (Appendix M) in the EFL context of Japan, Renandya and Hu's (2018) research ranked the listening comprehension difficulties (Appendix L) in the EFL context of China, and Stepanoviene's (2012) research ranked the listening comprehension difficulties in the EFL context of Lithuania (Appendix N). My study has found the difficulty factors that affect comprehension in a different sequential order from the above-mentioned research studies. Therefore, this study may provide a guideline for secondary school teachers and IELTS trainers to understand the listening comprehension difficulties of the Bangladeshi students so that they can deal with the problems while teaching listening for English language

proficiency. Moreover, the findings of the study may not be limited to the Bangladeshi context alone. The findings may also be informative for teachers and trainers from other EFL countries with low or middle-income economies who face a similar problem in implementing listening in classroom and assessment procedures and where low-resource classrooms exist. This study can also help them conceptualise and design their policies and practices for the benefit of their students.

My further intention in this study has been to review and report on the cutting-edge of contemporary global research on listening for language learning so far around the world in order to provide a theoretical foundation not only for my research but also for future projects that seek to improve English language teaching in Bangladesh. I have sought to understand and report the current debates about the strategic importance of top-down as opposed to bottom-up approaches, and about the role of cognitive and metacognitive processes of the brain in connection to short-term and long-term memory factors to process listening comprehension. I have argued that the use of strategies related to *top-down* or *bottom-up* approaches may depend on specific goals, learners' level of language proficiency, and the context of EFL teaching. I have also explored the tensions between teaching listening for academic purposes and everyday needs in different EFL contexts. My study has also explored to what extent IELTS practices might be useful models for teaching and assessing listening in schools. The *Teachers' Curriculum Guide* for the secondary teachers in Bangladesh has suggested measuring listening through similar types of exercises to IELTS. However, the purposes of listening practice for secondary students are different from the purpose of preparation for IELTS. The preparation for the listening skill of IELTS focuses mainly on audio drills of the test materials, whereas the focus of the listening practice for the secondary students is to improve their English language competence.

In addition, the importance of comprehensive training for the capacity development of secondary teachers in teaching listening and speaking skills has been accentuated in the study.

Reflection on my learning in brief

On top of that, this study has made an impact contributing to my knowledge through my journey as a researcher. Being a Bangladeshi English language teacher, the doctoral journey helped me understand my pedagogical and critical limitations regarding policy, practice teaching, and assessment of English language education. It has equipped me with useful methodologies, research tools and techniques, knowledge, and experience. It also has

provided me with deep insights into doing this type of qualitative study in the future. It has also helped me emerge as a researcher, enhancing my confidence as well as my critical eye. I have learned how to look into the *self* to develop a reflective critical lens on thinking procedures. The journey has taught me how to devise a research plan with a systematic approach using grounded theory to fit into a specific context. If doing research is a skill, I have started learning it since I took the journey and set out for the PhD degree.
In real-life communication, I have learned how to listen between the lines for a better understanding of a spoken text or while making a conversation with a person. I have also learned the importance of listening to the people who experience challenges both at the policy and practice levels for a better understanding of the curriculum and its implementation. The learning from the journey will guide me to undertake further research in similar contexts in the future with government or non-government agencies.

Extracting the philosophical undertone of listening from the existing context

Perhaps it is quite interesting to look at listening also from the point of view of the policymakers and question if they are listening at all to the people on the ground. The findings of this study indicate that there is a lack of direct communication between the policy people and the teachers. However, effective communication involves two-way communication: speaking and listening. The policymakers are happy to put schemes into the curriculum and textbooks. They have made a policy to insist on listening practice be done in the classroom. They support the necessity of oral skills for English language proficiency by including these skills in English language textbooks. A reasonably well-designed textbook can be positive to make listening happen in the classroom. However, no policy or textbook can automatically make listening practice happen as the policies and textbooks are only written materials. So, there are other issues related to teaching and teachers that need to be considered. Now the question is open whether the textbook and content developers of NCTB listen to the grassroots (often the teachers) to know about the difficulties in executing listening skill in classroom practice, and in particular whether they have listened to the constraints reported by teachers about the practice and assessment of listening. My research has revealed that there is a separation between the world of policymakers and classroom teachers in terms of classroom listening practice and assessment. Despite other pedagogical, testing, and technical challenges of teaching listening, the bilateral process of listening to

each other can bring about a common understanding of the actual barriers to CLT and so facilitate its effective use to happen in classroom teaching.

Recommendations

The findings of the study suggest a number of recommendations for policymakers and curriculum developers, training providers, secondary English teachers, headteachers, IELTS preparatory course trainers, and IELTS preparatory students.

For policymakers and curriculum developers

Policymakers and curriculum developers need a commission. The commission will take note of research and carefully consider local problems so that it can shape policy strategically and effectively. Only then, they can fit the policies into the local context and resolve grounded needs. To do this process, policymakers and the curriculum developers need to be informed by the best international research about language learning and at the same time, they need to ensure that they adapt general ideas to the local conditions of both rural and urban schools. They have to ensure the provision of relevant resources for practising listening activities in secondary classrooms. In this regard, they can provide digital support with internet connectivity to the teachers. They can also increase the functionality of the existing collaborative digital platform for the teachers named *Shikkhok Batayon.*

To reduce the urban-rural resource restrictions, they need to ensure that rural schools are adequately equipped with WiFi and multimedia resources and that teachers are trained to use them. If the functionality of the digital platform as well as the digital literacy of the teachers is increased by policymakers, it may help them to find strategies for reducing class numbers for the teachers. By doing so, they can help the teachers to make an interactive practice of the English language in the classroom.

Currently, policymakers suggest that teachers should follow the IELTS test format for testing listening. But without training, the teachers cannot conduct a listening test following the IELTS test format. Therefore, the policymakers should provide separate training to the teachers on how to conduct a listening test and develop sample question papers as they have proposed for the listening assessment in the curriculum. Policymakers and curriculum developers also need to engage with teachers, teacher trainers, and headteachers in planning the implementation of the policy.

To adopt a sustainable language policy, policymakers must revisit some of the policies objectively, sidelining the prescriptions of the donors, NGOs, or any other interest groups, and plan according to the ground reality and requirements. So, for better implementation of the English language education policy of Bangladesh, I suggest that the bottom-up approach can be the best. The policymakers should collect data from the field level institutions, then according to the actual needs and possibilities, they need to make policies. While implementing those policies, local-level institutions need to assist the policymakers. However, in every step, the policymakers need to assist the policy implementers on the ground. The policymakers then will take feedback from the implementers at the local level and according to the ground reality, decisions will be revised or new decisions will be taken. To do so, the Ministry of Education, being the policymaker and planner, needs to coordinate with the other two vital organisations − NCTB and BISEs − related to policy, practice, and assessment procedures so that the implementation complies with the policies effectively.

For training of secondary teachers

The secondary teachers receive the least structured support in the L2 classroom. They need to have training that can be practically implemented in the classroom. So, the training should involve a contextually-customised package on how to teach listening tasks to the secondary students. Training programmes should include theoretical aspects of the teaching of listening strategies and processes. Training in listening strategies should be embedded in actual comprehension tasks so that the strategy can be matched to the problem of understanding that gives rise to it.

The provision of pre-service training for secondary English teachers is needed. At present, English teachers only receive in-service training that is arranged most of the time in Dhaka. However, a large number of teachers are reluctant to go and receive the training in Dhaka for a variety of reasons. So, it is necessary to provide in-service programmes in regional sites, not just in the capital city. At the same time, secondary English teachers need to be provided with training for continuous professional development in teaching all four sets of skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Through CPD, they can develop themselves professionally and feel motivated to apply the knowledge they achieve.

There is a need to provide effective training on how to use digital learning content available on the NCTB website and other digital platforms currently provided by the government. A technology integration framework, such as TPACK can be introduced to the teachers as a part

of their training related to digital literacy. This will support them to identify and integrate three types of knowledge − technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge - that need to combine for successful classroom teaching using digital technology. Therefore, the existing module of the secondary teachers' training in English language courses should be modified.

For the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISEs)

The BISEs are mainly responsible to conduct, evaluate, and publish the test results of the secondary and higher secondary public examinations. To perform the whole examination process, the study finds that BISEs lack coordination with NCTB. Therefore, BISEs need to coordinate effectively with NCTB to increase the *validity* and *reliability* of the public examinations. BISEs also need to negotiate with the Ministry of Education to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge and resources for conducting and assessing listening tests to include the test in national examinations.

For the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB)

The NCTB is the main organisation to plan and design and propose content for secondary English textbooks. It also approves, develops, and proposes teaching and learning contents of the secondary English curriculum for English education. However, the study finds that NCTB needs to improve the Teachers' Curriculum Guide for English subjects, especially the guidelines and descriptions related to teaching and testing of listening skill. Although the Teachers' Curriculum Guide has provided information on some listening test types (p. xxii), it has not guided how to teach listening or how to improve secondary students' listening comprehension skills from the perspective of micro and macro listening skills, different listening strategies, and processes, which I discussed in earlier chapters. So, the NCTB needs to consider listening from a more holistic approach. The instructions and guidelines for the teaching of listening need to consider all types of listening instructions, such as text-orientated, learner-oriented, and communication-oriented activities depending on the need and capacity of the secondary students. Ideas and practices recommended by researchers and language educators and teachers should be considered in order to make a listening practice successful in the classroom. Moreover, both the National Curriculum for English (VI- X) and Teachers' Curriculum Guide have proposed some guidelines for listening assessment. But neither of the manuals has generated a sample question paper for the assessment to assist the teachers in conducting a listening assessment. Even the *EfT* textbooks have exercises on a

listening test but do not have a sample copy of a question paper on how to assess the listening tasks. So, a sample question paper on listening assessment needs to be included to help the teachers design a question paper for the listening assessment. In this regard, the organisation can suggest that the Ministry of Education should set up a separate moderation body comprising of the officials of the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISEs), teacher trainers, and the secondary teachers to conduct and assess both listening and speaking skills by setting up labs at the district-level schools in different regions of the country. In this regard, the district-level schools need to cover the adjacent schools within a particular distance as the government has resource restrictions to provide each school with such a lab.

The NCTB also needs to play the liaison role to augment the quality of the assessment of the English papers in public examinations. To do so, it needs to negotiate two points with the Ministry of Education. First, it needs to get the approval of the Ministry of Education to develop and update listening materials for the assessment purpose regularly. Second, it can advise the Ministry of Education to monitor the BISEs so that the assessment procedure is not simply repetitive to previous exams.

For headteachers

The headteachers can take initiative to create a partnership with the teachers to reduce workload if needed and create opportunities for professional and collaborative engagement in the schools to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The headteachers need to consult with their teachers about the implementation requirements of the English language curriculum and how best to fulfil them. In this regard, the headteachers can engage teachers in the process of making academic decisions. Despite the existing limitations of physical and digital facilities for the teaching of listening skill of the English language, the headteachers can lead from the front to deal with the relevant academic problems to maximise the teaching and learning in the schools. Being the head of a school, headteachers need to understand that education is the process of creating opportunities to learn.

For teachers

The study finds that listening skill is not being taught effectively in secondary classrooms in Bangladesh. The different phases of listening practice (pre-while-post listening phases) proposed by the researchers (Richards, 2015) are missing in the teaching of listening in secondary English language education. Here I consider what procedures may be involved in

actually teaching effective listening– procedures such as the provision of adequate preparation, use of listening strategies, and appropriate listening tasks, together with positive feedback, error analysis, and remedial action (Figure 16).

Pre-listening: Pre-listening activities provide confidence as well as potentially useful information about the topic to the students. They also prepare students, primarily by getting them interested in the topic, activating schemata, and working with top-down processing of listening. At this stage, after preparing the students by giving probable listening clues, a listening comprehension task could be given to the students.

While-listening: This phase focuses on comprehension through exercises that require selective listening, gist listening, sequencing, etc. At this stage, students are now 'on-task' and engaged in real-time processing of the listening input.

Post-listening: This phase typically involves a response to comprehension and may require students to give opinions about a listening task. Besides, checking the answers of the students is not enough. Teachers need to go into detail. This may involve a microanalysis of sections of the text to enable students to recognise such features as blends, reduced words, ellipsis, and other features of spoken discourse that they were unable to process or recognise. Moreover, teachers can teach different strategies to the students that need to be applied for better listening comprehension such as how to use both top-down and bottom-up processing.

For example, to teach the listening exercises in lesson 22 of the textbook of 6th Grade (Appendix O) following the *pre-while-post* listening process, a teacher can provide some relevant background information about the pictures to prepare the students for the topic before they listen to it. The teacher can also give some listening clues to the students by telling the probable words that they may think difficult when they will listen to them. After that, a teacher can play the relevant clip of that exercise to be listened to by the students. Finally, after the students finish listening, the teacher can analyse and discuss the issues related to the comprehension difficulties (such as phonological aspects of the spoken words, different strategies for listening comprehension, phono-orthographic features of the words, and unknown vocabulary issues, and speed of the spoken text). After the discussion and analysis of the listening comprehension difficulties of the students, the teacher can work through the issues and teach the students different listening strategies about how to deal with each of the difficulties for better listening comprehension of the spoken texts given in the textbooks.

The study also finds that the focus of the teaching of listening skill is not on the process of listening but rather on the product of listening. So, following the three-level (pre-while-post) listening instruction by the teachers, the focus of listening can be shifted from a product-based approach to a process-based approach to facilitate a more effective listening practice in the classroom.

If it is not possible to teach listening using digital support, the teachers can play the role of a recorder. The teachers can be one of the valuable sources of listening input for the students. As teachers discuss classroom business, answer students' questions, or exchange a variety of academic talks, they can provide students with natural opportunities for interaction and practising listening to unscripted speech. This type of input is the easiest to control for difficulty because the teacher can effortlessly paraphrase, repeat, explain, and change the speed of delivery. This type of input can also help the teachers to adjust their pace of delivery depending on both lower-proficiency listeners and competent listeners.

Along with the listening extracts available online that are related to the listening exercises of the EfT textbooks, the teachers can explore television movies and other readily available and authentic English audio-visual input to improve students' vocabulary, syntactic knowledge, accent, pronunciation, prosodic aspects of spoken texts (such as *stress, rhythm, intonation, elision or contractions* of words) which are important for English listening comprehension to understand the communicative form of English. To do so, teachers can develop networks with colleagues that will support them to exchange and share the resources and materials for listening practice. If the secondary English teachers can make conversation in English among themselves, they can develop their level of confidence and fluency in speaking in English.

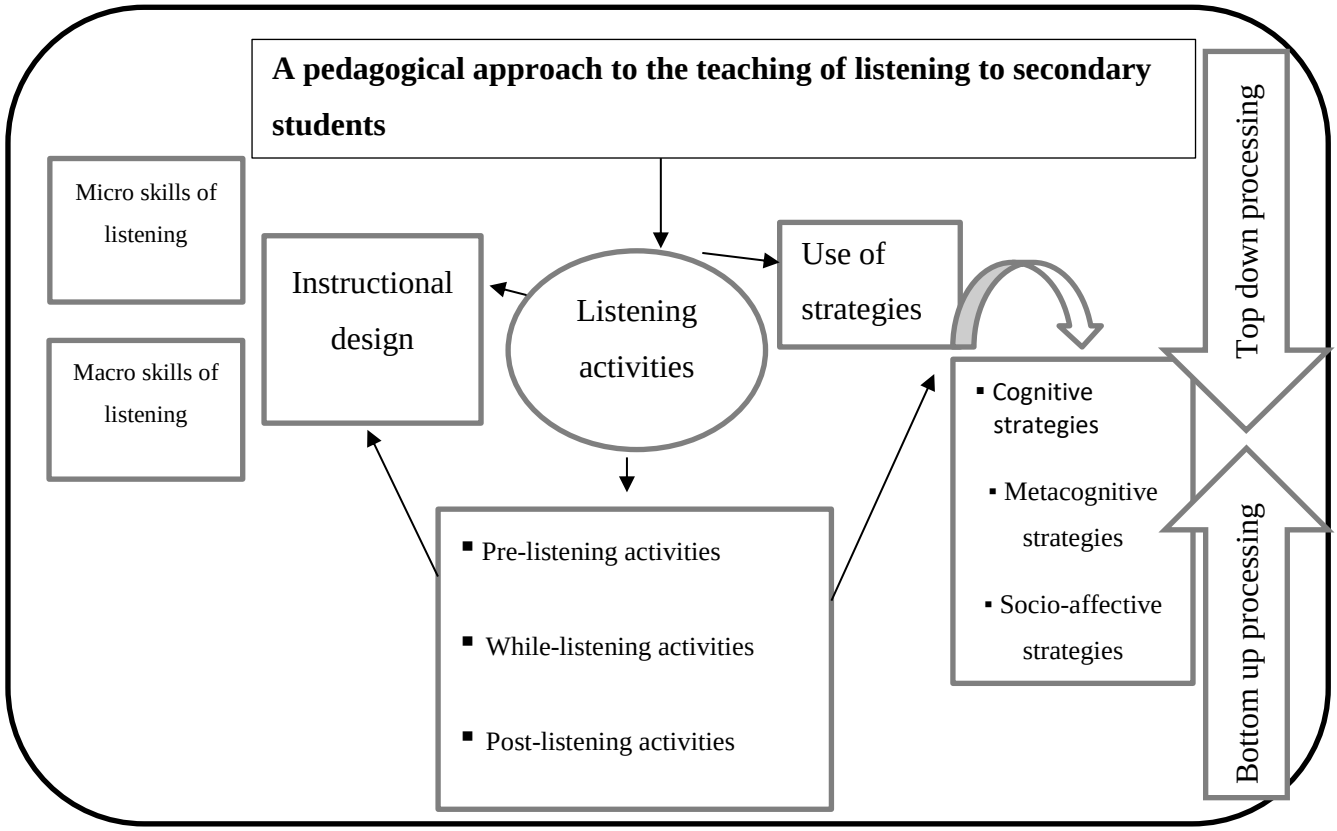

Figure 16. A possible framework for the teaching of listening comprehension

Although there is a rich body of international research about the use of listening strategies and processes, there is very little research available based on the Bangladeshi context. This research has found that trainers of the IELTS preparatory course have rarely taught the bottom-up skills of listening. Moreover, they have not prepared the learners on how to listen to develop a listening skill. So, the trainers need to teach the bottom-up skills of listening before or along with top-down skills of listening according to the need and capacity of the learners to increase their listening repertoires. The study also reports that if the IELTS preparatory course trainers do not teach the phono-orthographic features of the spoken texts, listening strategies can make only a small contribution to the L2 listening development of the IELTS preparatory students. So, the IELTS preparatory course trainers need to adopt a more holistic approach to IELTS listening instruction.

For IELTS preparatory students

The research has found that the IELTS preparatory students perceived the listening tests as both the most difficult and the most important tests for them. Unknown vocabulary has been identified as the main obstacle to listening comprehension. It has been mainly for two reasons. First, they may lack the required range of vocabulary that is needed for the post-secondary level. Second, they have a lack of knowledge of phoneme-grapheme relationships of words. Therefore, the students need to improve their range of English vocabulary as well as the phonological forms of that vocabulary. The preparatory students also need to improve their listening comprehension by listening extensively to the spoken texts on a variety of topics or issues.

Further research direction

The study focuses primarily on the problems and the challenges of implementing listening in secondary classrooms and the challenges of listening comprehension the post-secondary Bangla-medium students face in the listening test such as the IELTS test.

So, further study needs to conduct action research to look into the classroom practice of listening and its benefits for overall English language development for secondary students. There may be more future research on teachers' training focusing specifically on increasing their capacity in teaching listening and speaking skills in a secondary classroom. The training programmes need to be practically applicable to prepare teachers on how to do listening practice better in a classroom considering the contextual need and reality.

Due to the ethical and time constraints, I could not include the secondary students as the research participants. It is important to investigate secondary students' understanding of listening skill and such research might unearth new insights into how to design a training program for the teachers to teach the listening skill. Future research can include secondary students listening to their experiences and perceptions about the listening practice at secondary schools for English language proficiency. Future research can also be done on how to set up the language clubs and language labs at secondary schools in different regions to activate all four skills for the language learning process. Research can also be done on how other foreign languages, such as Arabic, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese can be incorporated into secondary education as they are the development partners of Bangladesh for economic cooperation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The chronicle of the Education Commissions/Committees of Bangladesh

Name of the Commissions/Committees	Year
1. Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission	1972
2. National Curriculum and Syllabus Taskforce Commission	1976
3. National Education Advisory Committee	1978
4. Mazid Khan Education Commission	1983
5. Mofizuddin Ahmed Education Commission	1987
6. Shamsul Haque Education Commission	1997
7. M A Bari Education Commission	2001
8. Moniruzzaman Mia Education Commission	2003
9. Kabir Chowdhury Education Commission	2009

Appendix B: Ethics Approval

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEALAND

HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: 2016/57/ERHEC

9 January 2017

S M Akramul Kabir
STED
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear S M

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal "Listen Up! Status of Listening in English Language Learning in Bangladesh" has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your emails of 11th December 2016 and 9th January 2017.

Should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

pp R. Robinson

Patrick Shepherd
Chair
Educational Research Human Ethics Committee

Please note that ethical approval relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research.

F E S

Appendix C: Consent letter of the IELTS Preparatory Institution

EXECUTIVE'S CARE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTRE

Institution of Engineers Building (2nd Floor)
S. S. Khaled Road, Chittagong
Telephone : 031-626290, 626122

Date : January 06, 2017

To whom it may concern

I am writing this letter as the consent for S M Akramul Kabir, PhD candidate, College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand who wants to conduct a research work in this institution. The institution has the full understanding of his research related to its IELTS preparatory course. The institution is the representative of IDP Education at Chittagong, Bangladesh to work as a test centre as well as to provide the IELTS preparatory course.

I wish him all success in Life.

Sincerely Yours

Mehrab Mashuk
Managing Director & CEO
Executive's Care
IDP IELTS Chittagong Centre
Test Centre – BD050

EXECUTIVE'S CARE Chittagong. ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTRE

Appendix D: Information Sheet for the participants

Telephone: + 64 33642987 ext. 43225, +88-01819841767 E
Mail:**sm.kabir@pg.canterbury.ac.nz**

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Project: Listen up or lose out! Policy and practice of listening skill in English language education in Bangladesh

Information Sheet for participants

Dear Student,

My name is S M Akramul Kabir, a PhD student under the supervision of Emeritus Professor Janinka Greenwood and Associate Professor Kevin Watson at the College of Education of University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project titled "Listen up! Status of listening skill in English language learning in Bangladesh". This research project will investigate the factors that are counted for the low status of listening in English learning in Bangladesh. In connection to this, the project will research the listening skills of Bangladeshi students preparing for the IELTS test develop in terms of – a) IELTS listening test task scores, and b) micro and macro listening skills. It will also investigate the test-takers perceptions of which parts of the IELTS listening are most challenging and how novice and experienced test-takers prepare inside and outside of class.

If you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to fill in a questionnaire at the beginning of your preparatory course and after the completion of the preparatory course. To participate in an interview will take 20-25 minutes. I will ask you about your perception of listening for IELTS before and after the preparatory crash-course by a questionnaire at the institution. I will arrange an interview schedule at a time convenient to you.

There are no apparent or foreseen risks in participating in this study except the probability that participants may think that the directors of the institute will know their score for this research participation. For this reason, the confidentiality of the participants' mock listening test scores or interview results will not be given to the centre. Please be informed that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, I will use my best endeavours to remove any of the information relating to you from the project, including any final publication, provided that this remains practically achievable.

The data of this research will be secured in a locked cabinet, and electronic data will be secured in a password-protected P: drive of the university server. Data will be kept for the period of at least ten years following the completion of the study, and some of the data I may keep for future academic publication and the rest of the data will be destroyed after the five years of completion of my study. Only I and my supervisors will have access to the data during this period of time. I will report the results of this study in my PhD thesis, and also may report in academic publications and conference presentations. All information collected will be treated in strict confidence, and neither the institution nor the participants' identities will be disclosed to anyone or in any publication.

If you would like to receive a summary of this study, please monitor the results on pdf through the link (goo.gl/3vQ5wD) or email me (**sm.kabir@pg.canterbury.ac.nz**). Should you have any concerns or

complaints about this study, you may contact either me (email: **sm.kabir@pg.canterbury.ac.nz**; Mobile: +88-01819841767) or the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

This project has received ethical approval from the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury.

If you agree to participate, please read and sign the consent form.

Thank you,

S M Akramul Kabir

Appendix E: Consent form for the participants

Telephone: +64 33642987, +88-01819841767
E Mail:**sm.kabir@pg.canterbury.ac.nz**
Date:

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Project: Listen up! Status of listening in English language learning in Bangladesh

Consent Form for Participants

- ☐ I have read, understood and retained a copy of the information sheet provided to me.
- ☐ I have understood the purpose of the research and data collection procedures of this study.
- ☐ I am fully aware of what I am required to do if I participate in this study.
- ☐ I have read the information letter and understand that all the information collected will be kept confidential and only the researcher will have access to the data.
- ☐ I have explained the steps that will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of all information.
- ☐ I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time of the research as long as this remains practical.
- ☐ I have been informed that my name will not be published anywhere in the research and my identity will not be revealed to anyone and I have been given the chance to choose the preferred pseudonym.

Please use _____ as pseudonym for me.

I am aware that all raw data will be held securely and kept for a minimum period of 5 years following completion of the project and the researcher may keep some part of the collected data even longer for future academic publication. I also understand that the data may be used for academic publications and conference presentations.
I have been informed that I can receive a copy of the report of this study at my e-mail address given below. (*Please tick the appropriate box*)

☐ I would like to receive a report of the study to be sent to me at _____. (*Indicate your preferred email address*).

☐ I do not want to receive the report of this study.

I have been informed that I have the freedom to contact the researcher via the contact details provided above. I have also understood that this project has received ethical approval from the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury. I have also been informed that for any concern or complaint, I can contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

By signing below, I hereby agree to participate in this study.

Name :

Date :

Signature :

Cell/ Phone Number :

Please return this completed consent form to S M Akramul Kabir in the envelope provided by……

Appendix F: Questionnaire for the IELTS participants (pre-course survey)

1. Participant ID _____

2. The highest education level you have completed:

   ☐ Higher secondary ☐ Bachelor ☐ Master ☐ others: Please specify___

3. At what age/Grade did you start learning English?

4. Have you studied abroad? How long?

5. How many years of language learning experience do you have except your school or college courses (e.g., extra courses, private tutoring, etc.)?

6. Have you ever visited an English-speaking country? If yes, how long have you stayed there?

7. How much do you listen to native speakers speaking English?

   ☐ Not at all ☐ a little ☐ somewhat ☐ moderate ☐ sufficient

Please tick on the appropriate option/options below:

1. In which economic group is you?

   ☐ Rich ☐ Upper-middle-class ☐ Middle class ☐ underprivileged

2. What is your living place?

   ☐ Urban ☐ Suburban ☐ Rural

3. What is your father's occupation?

   ☐ Job ☐ Business ☐ Agriculture ☐ Others: Please specify _____

4. What is your mother's occupation?

   ☐ Job ☐ Business ☐ Agriculture ☐ Others: Please specify _____

5. What is the highest level of education for your father?

   ☐ Higher secondary ☐ Bachelor ☐ Master ☐ others: Please specify___

8. What is the highest level of education for your mother?

   ☐ Higher secondary ☐ Bachelor ☐ Master ☐ others: Please specify___

9. What is the language of instruction in your schooling?
   ☐ Bangla ☐ English ☐ Both ☐ Others. Please specify_____

10. Which skill do you think is best to improve your English?
    ☐ Listening ☐ Speaking ☐ Reading ☐ Writing

11. What is the most difficult skill for you in English language learning?

☐ Listening ☐ Speaking ☐ Reading ☐ Writing

12. What is the purpose of sitting for the IELTS test?

☐ Job ☐ Education ☐ Migration ☐ Others: Please specify_____

13. In addition to your academic learning, what do you do personally to improve your English? How often do you do that?

☐ Watching English movies or English news on BBC, CNN, Al-Jazeera, etc.

☐ Daily ☐ weekly ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

☐ Listening to English Music.

☐ Daily ☐ weekly ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

☐ Speaking in English with friends and family members

☐ Daily ☐ weekly ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

☐ Reading books/novels in English

☐ Daily ☐ weekly ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

☐ Other, Please specify_____

☐ Daily ☐ weekly ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

14. Before the IELTS preparatory course, how have you been taught English listening skill?

15. What aspects of the listening test do you find most difficult to comprehend in IELTS? Please rate in the order of difficulty.

☐ Fast speed

☐ Very easy ☐ Easy ☐ Average ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult

☐ Unfamiliar content

☐ Very easy ☐ Easy ☐ Average ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult

☐ Unfamiliar Words

☐ Very easy ☐ Easy ☐ Average ☐ difficult ☐ Very difficult

☐ Unfamiliar accent

☐ Very easy ☐ Easy ☐ Average ☐ difficult ☐ Very difficult

☐ Other, Please specify_____

☐ Very easy ☐ Easy ☐ Average ☐ difficult ☐ Very difficult

If you face any of the difficulties mentioned above, please write the reasons below:

16. How difficult for you to perceive different types of speeches on the IELTS listening test?

☐ Two people's conversation

☐ Very easy, ☐ easy ☐ not sure ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult

☐ Group conversation

☐ Very easy, ☐ easy ☐ not sure ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult

☐ Mono speech (informal, such as radio, TV announcements)

☐ Very easy, ☐ easy ☐ not sure ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult

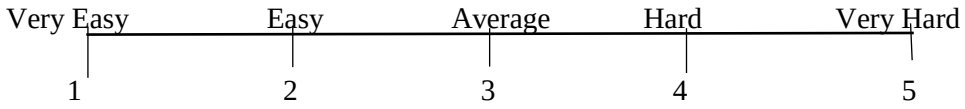
☐ Mono speech (formal, such as lecture in the class)

☐ Very easy, ☐ easy ☐ not sure ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult

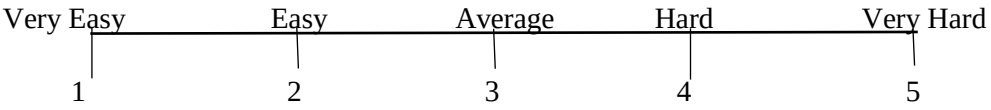
Please explain the reasons below:

17. Sometimes IELTS listening tasks require you to read between the lines or idiomatic expressions. Were you able to answer that? Explain, please.

18. How do you rate the intelligibility of the English spoken by Bangladeshi teachers while teaching in the class? Please rate your opinion below based on the scale:



19. How do you rate the intelligibility of English spoken by native teachers while teaching in the class? Please rate your opinion below based on the scale:



20. Comment on if the familiarity of the topic helped your comprehension at the time of the IELTS listening test.

21. Comment on how do the pictures or diagrams on the question paper help you comprehend better at the time of the listening test?

22. Describe the strategies you tried to improve your comprehension of the listening tasks.

Appendix G: Questionnaire for the IELTS participants (post-course survey)

Participant ID:

Now you have finished the course. Your experience and concepts of IELTS listening skill have improved. Please tick and/or write in the text box where necessary:

1. The highest education level you have completed:

   ☐ Higher secondary ☐ Bachelor ☐ Master ☐ others: Please specify___

2. At what age/grade did you start learning English?

3. Have you studied abroad? How long?

4. How many years of language learning experience do you have except your school or college courses (e.g. extra courses, private tutoring, etc.)?

5. Have you ever visited an English-speaking country? If yes, how long have you stayed there?

6. How much do you listen to native speakers speaking English?

   ☐ Not at all ☐ a little ☐ somewhat ☐ moderate ☐ sufficient

7. Which skill do you think is best to improve your English?

   ☐ Listening ☐ Speaking ☐ Reading ☐ Writing

7. What is the most difficult skill for you in English language learning?

   ☐ Listening ☐ Speaking ☐ Reading ☐ Writing

8. Have you ever visited any English-speaking country? If yes, how long have you stayed there?

9. How much do you listen to native speakers speaking English?

☐ Not at all ☐ a little ☐ somewhat ☐ moderate ☐ sufficient

10. In addition to your academic learning, what do you do personally to improve your English? How often do you do that?

☐ Watching English movies or English news on BBC, CNN, Al-Jazeera, etc.

☐ Daily ☐ weekly ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

☐ Listening to English Music.

☐ Daily ☐ weekly ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

☐ Speaking in English with friends and family members

☐ Daily ☐ weekly ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

☐ Reading books/novels in English

☐ Daily ☐ weekly ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

☐ Other, Please specify_____

☐ Daily ☐ weekly ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

10. Before the IELTS preparatory course, how have you been taught listening skill?

11. What aspects of the listening test do you find most difficult to comprehend in IELTS? Please rate in the order of difficulty.

☐ Fast speed

☐ Very easy ☐ Easy ☐ Average ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult

☐ Unfamiliar content

☐ Very easy ☐ Easy ☐ Average ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult

☐ Unfamiliar words

☐ Very easy ☐ Easy ☐ Average ☐ difficult ☐ Very difficult

☐ Unfamiliar accent

☐ Very easy ☐ Easy ☐ Average ☐ difficult ☐ Very difficult

☐ Other, Please specify_____

☐ Very easy ☐ Easy ☐ Average ☐ difficult ☐ Very difficult

If you face any of the difficulties mentioned above, please write the reasons below:

12. How difficult for you to perceive different types of speeches on the IELTS listening test?

☐ Two people's conversation

☐ Very easy, ☐ easy ☐ not sure ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult

☐ Group conversation

☐ Very easy, ☐ easy ☐ not sure ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult

☐ Mono speech (informal, such as radio, TV announcements)

☐ Very easy, ☐ easy ☐ not sure ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult

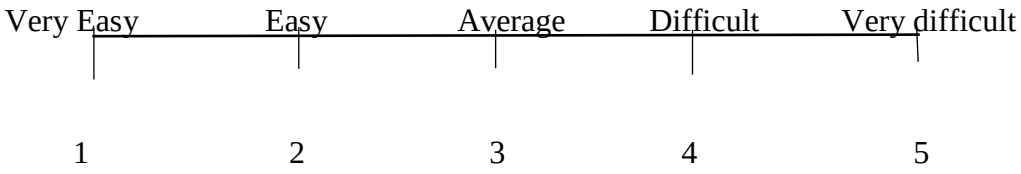
☐ Mono speech (formal, such as lecture in the class)

☐ Very easy, ☐ easy ☐ not sure ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult

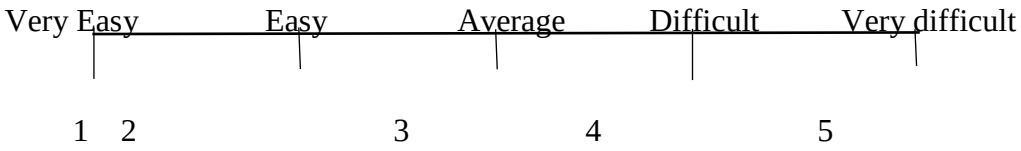
Please explain the reasons below:

13. Sometimes IELTS listening tasks require you to read between the lines or idiomatic expressions. Were you able to answer that? Explain, please.

14. How do you rate the intelligibility of the English spoken by Bangladeshi teachers while teaching in the class? Please rate your opinion below based on the scale:



15. How do you rate the intelligibility of English spoken by native teachers while teaching in the class? Please rate your opinion below based on the scale:



16. Comment on if the familiarity of the topic helped your comprehension at the time of the IELTS listening test.

17. Comment on how did the pictures or diagrams on the question paper help you to comprehend better at the time of the listening test?

18. escribe the strategies you tried to improve your comprehension of the listening tasks.

19. Describe the listening strategies you have been taught to answer the tasks for the IELTS test in the preparatory course?

20. Describe the listening strategies you have been taught to improve your overall English competency in the IELTS preparatory course?

21. In addition to your IELTS preparatory course, what have you done personally to improve your listening skills? Please explain below:

Appendix H: Proposed distribution of marks for English 1st Paper

Subject: English 1st paper. Total marks: 100				
Skills	**Assessment area**	**Total marks**	**Test items**	**Notes**
Listening	Students' ability to listen to and Understand English with acceptable pronunciation	**10**	MCQ, Gap filling	***Test items must be developed by a question setter***
Speaking	Students' ability to speak acceptable English with understandable pronunciation	**10**	Describe/narrating/ answering questions	
Reading	Students' ability to read a text and materials for comprehension and higher-order thinking	**40**	MCQ, Answering questions (open-ended and close-ended questions), Gap filling without clues, substitution tables, Information transfer, Rearranging	***For text materials (Text materials should be developed by question setters. They should not be taken from any textbooks***
Writing	Students' ability to write correct English of an appropriate level for expressing ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc.	**40**	Writing paragraph, answering questions/completing a story Writing formal/informal letters, Describing graphs and charts, Writing compositions (on personal Experience and familiar topics, recent events/incidents), Writing emails, CV	

Appendix I: Sample question paper of the EfT textbook of Grade 6

English Paper one

Full Marks : 80

Time : 3 hours

Section A: Reading (Total Marks 40)

1. Read the following text and answer the question that follows.

Six health tips

Context is very important in maintaining health status and quality of life. Health can be maintained and improved through efforts and intelligent lifestyle of an **individual**. Here are some basic tips for maintaining a good health.

1. **Exercise**

   You don't need to be member of a gym. Thirty minutes walk every day will **prevent** weight gain and encourage moderate weight loss.

2. **Eat healthy**

   Reduce fat **intake**, cut down on sugar and opt for fruits and vegetables. This helps reduce blood pressure. Healthy food will also lead to better blood sugar control.

3. **Reduce stress**

   We don't always get everything we want. We have to accept that there are things that we cannot control. Managing time is also of great importance. We must allow ourselves enough time to get things done. Set a time during the day for **relaxation**.

4. **Improve sleep**

   Avoid coffee, alcohol, nicotine, and other chemicals that **interfere** with sleep. **Equip** your bedroom with a comfortable mattress and pillows. Sleep in a dark clean and quiet environment.

5. **Meditation**

   Meditation has been linked to a variety of health benefits. It has been

f. My mom phoned the doctor and made an appointment.

g. He told me I had an infection.

h. He also gave me some advices.

i. I explained the doctor what was wrong.

j. He gave me a prescription.

Ans.

a, f, d, i, b, g, j, h, e, c

Section B: Writing (Total Marks: 40)

7. The story below is about a boy and a crocodile. Complete the story. You can use the given clues. 10

Once there was a crocodile. He was really hungry. He saw a boy. The boy had some meat in his hand. He wanted to eat both the boy and the meat. He decided to play some tricks with the boy.

The crocodile said, "Oh! Little Boy! Could you please give me some meat?"

The boy said, "No, you..... me.

The crocodile said, "No, no, believe....., I promise..... .....

There came a rabbit. ..... wanted to ..... . Now the crocodile..... the rabbit first. So..... .The boy ..... and the rabbit also..... . The cunning crocodile ..... .

Answer:

Answer may vary. A probable answer is given here.

Once there was a crocodile. He was really hungry. He saw a boy. The boy had some meat in his hand. He wanted to eat both the boy and the meat. He decided to play trick with the boy.

The crocodile said, "Oh! Little Boy! Could you please give me some meat?"

The boy said, "Oh no, you will eat me"

Appendix J: Question paper of SSC 2018

গাজর ১৮৪ ১০০৩/২০১৮

Ka Set

ENGLISH (COMPULSORY)

[According to the Syllabus of 2018]

FIRST PAPER

Subject Code : | 1 | 0 | 7 |

Time—3 hours

Full marks—100

[N.B.—The figures in the right margin indicate full marks.]

Marks

1. Read the passage and answer the questions **A** and **B** :—

Beauty is easy to appreciate but difficult to define. As we look around, we discover beauty in pleasurable objects and sights—in nature, in the laughter of children, in the kindness of strangers. But asked to define, we run into difficulties. Does beauty have an independent objective identity? Is it universal, or is it dependent on our sense perceptions? Does it lie in the eye of the beholder? —We ask ourselves. A further difficulty arises when beauty manifests itself not only by its presence, but by its absence as well, as when we are repulsed by ugliness and desire beauty. But then ugliness has as much a place in our lives as beauty, or may be more as when there is widespread hunger and injustice in a society. Philosophers have told us that beauty is an important part of life, but isn't ugliness a part of life too? And if art has beauty as an important ingredient, can it confine itself only to a projection of beauty? Can art ignore what is not beautiful? Poets and artists have provided an answer by incorporating both into their work. In doing so, they have often tied beauty to truth and justice, so that what is not beautiful assumes a tolerable proportion as something that represents some truth about life. John Keats, the romantic poet, wrote in his celebrated 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty', by which he means that truth, even if it's not pleasant, becomes beautiful at a higher level. Similarly, what is beautiful forever remains true. Another meaning, in the context of the Grecian Urn—an art object—is that truth is a condition of art.

A. Choose the correct answer from the alternatives :— 1×5=5

(*a*) The word appreciate means——
(*i*) praise (*ii*) choose (*iii*) select (*iv*) like

(*b*) The word "repulsed" stands for——
(*i*) disguised (*ii*) ignored (*iii*) attracted (*iv*) regarded

(*c*) Beauty also prevails in——
(*i*) truth (*ii*) pleasurable objects (*iii*) ugliness (*iv*) beautification

(*d*) The best synonym of "beholder" is——
(*i*) runner (*ii*) sender (*iii*) watcher (*iv*) stopper

(*e*) We face difficulties——
(*i*) when we go through any poem
(*ii*) when we are told to define beauty
(*iii*) when we appreciate beauty
(*iv*) when we are told to define truth

[Please turn over

Marks

B. Answer the following questions :— 2×5=10

(*a*) When do we run into difficulties?
(*b*) Is ugliness a part of life? If so, how?
(*c*) What has John Keats written in "Ode on a Grecian Urn"?
(*d*) When does "ugliness" occupy a place in our life?
(*e*) How do poets and artists provide answer about the questions on how to define beauty?

2. Read the following text and make a flow chart showing the goal of peace movement. (No. 1 has been done for you) :— 2×5=10

A peace movement is a social movement that seeks to achieve ideals such as the ending of a particular war (or all wars), minimize inter-human violence in a particular place or type of situation, including ban of guns. and is often linked to the goal of achieving world peace. Means to achieve these ends include advocacy of pacifism, non-violent resistance, diplomacy, boycotts, demonstrations, peace camps; supporting anti-war political candidates and banning guns, creating open government, direct democracy; supporting people who expose war crimes or conspiracies to create wars, and making laws. Different organizations involved in peace movements may have some diverse goals but one common goal is sustainability of peace. Peace movement is basically an all-encompassing "anti-war movement". It is primarily characterized by a belief that human beings should not wage war on each other or engage in violent conflicts over language, race, natural resources, religion or ideology. It is believed that military power is not the equivalent of justice. The peace movement tends to oppose the proliferation of dangerous technologies and weapons of mass destruction, in particular, nuclear weapons and biological warfare. Moreover, many object to the export of weapons including hand-held machine guns and grenades by leading economic nations to lesser developed nations.

1. end of wars	→	2.	→	3.	→	4.	→	5.	→	6.

3. Write a summary of the following passage :— 10

Bangladesh is blessed with huge inland open water resources. It has numerous rivers, canals, beels, lakes, and vast areas of floodplains. Hakaluki haor is one of the major wetlands of Bangladesh. With a land area of 18,386 hectares, it supports a rich biodiversity and provides direct and indirect livelihood benefits to nearly 1,90,000 people. This haor was declared an Ecologically Critical Area in April 1999 by the government of Bangladesh. Hakaluki is a complex ecosystem, containing more than 238 interconnecting beels and jalmahals.

The haor falls under two administrative districts, Maulvibazar and Sylhet. Some 1,90,000 people live in the area surrounding the haor.

Hakaluki haor is an important source of fisheries resources for Bangladesh. Kalibaus, Boal, Rui, Ghagot, Pabda, and Chapila are the main fish species found here. From the Kushiara there are frequent upstream movements of fish towards the beels and tributaries of Hakaluki. The beels in Hakaluki haor provide winter shelter for the mother fisheries. In early monsoon these mother fisheries produce millions of fries for the entire downstream fishing communities. Floodplains are also an important source of fisheries resources within the area. However, many of the beels have lost their capacity to provide shelter for mother fisheries because of sand deposits from upstream rivers and canals, use of complete dewatering technique for fishing and lack of aquatic plants to provide feed and shelter for parents fish.

Marks

4. Read the following text and fill in the blanks with suitable word from the box. There are more words than needed. Make any grammatical change if necessary :— $\frac{1}{2}\times10=5$

warming	cut	rise	anticipation	habitats	increase	extinction
recklessly	severe	imperative	particularly	catastrophe	provide	alarming

The destruction of forests and other (*a*) ——— is causing the (*b*) ——— of various plants and animals everyday. In the last 25 years alone the world has lost one-third of its natural wealth. Forests are being (*c*) ——— down. Moreover, they are being burnt (*d*) ——— resulting in an (*e*) ——— in carbon dioxide and ultimately the water level is (*f*) ——— as a consequence of global (*g*) ——— . It is (*h*) ——— that the new century will face an overwhelming environment (*i*) ——— . It is therefore (*j*) ——— to check the reckless pollution of the environment.

5. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words in each gap :— 1×10=10

In our country, women are the worst sufferers in every stage of life. Social prejudices and customs tend to (*a*) ——— their position. When a female child is born, it is not regarded (*b*) ——— a happy event. She is not welcomed with the deep (*c*) ——— of heart. Instead of being delighted, most of the members of the family think that she has come to add to their (*d*) ——— . Even the mother of the female child is not welcomed cordially for giving (*e*) ——— to a female child. Rather the mother of the female child is (*f*) ——— for this. In the most cases, women are the victim of gender (*g*) ——— . In fact, the life of our women is not smooth (*h*) ——— . If we want lasting development of the country, we have to (*i*) ——— the dignified status of (*j*) ——— women of our country. The government is conscious of this matter.

6. The following sentences are jumbled. Re-arrange them in proper sequence :— 10

(*i*) In 1880, Rabindranath was called back to India.

(*ii*) He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913 for Gitanjali.

(*iii*) He returned home without any qualification of distinction.

(*iv*) He wrote Gitanjali, a collection of Bengali songs of superior quality.

(*v*) Rabinadranath Tagore was born in 1861 into a respectable family at Jorasako in Kolkata.

(*vi*) At the age of seventeen, in 1878 he reached London to attend school.

(*vii*) He went to school early and wrote his first verse at the age of eight.

(*viii*) The experience had a lasting effect on his later life.

(*ix*) However, he never gave up his habit of writing poetry.

(*x*) He gathered much experience from his stay in London.

Please turn over

Marks

7. Write a paragraph on "The historic speech of 7th March" in about **200** words based on the answers to the following questions :— 10

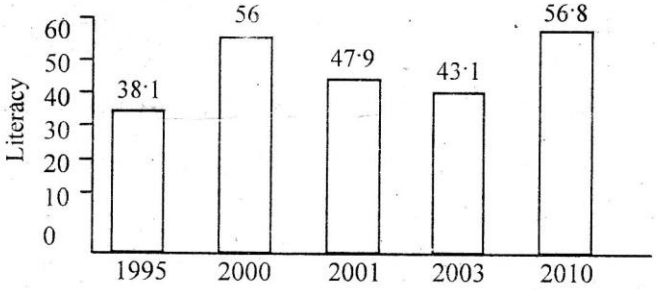
(*i*) When was the speech delivered?
(*ii*) Where was the speech delivered?
(*iii*) Who were addressed in this speech?
(*iv*) How was the speech related to our national history?
(*v*) How is the speech evaluated internationally?

8. Read the beginning of the following story and complete it in your own way. Give a title to the story :— 7

One day a girl of class five was going to school. Suddenly she saw a money bag dropped by someone on the road. She was at a loss .....

9. Suppose, you are Rafa. Write an e-mail to your foreign friend narrating the scenic beauty of Bangladesh. 5

10. The graph below shows the literacy rate of Bangladesh from 1995 to 2010. Describe the graph in at least 80 words. You should highlight the information and report the main features given in the graph :— 10



11. Write down the theme of the following poem. (Not more than **50** words) :— 8

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude;
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude,
Heigh-ho! sing heigh-ho! unto the green holly :
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly :
Then heigh-ho, the holly!
This life is most jolly.
Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot :
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not.
Heigh-ho! sing heigh-ho! unto the green holly .....

Appendix K: IELTS Band Descriptors

9	Expert user	Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
8	Very good user	Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex, detailed argumentation well.
7	Good user	Has operational command of the language, although with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
6	Competent user	Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
5	Modest user	Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, although is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
4	Limited user	Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
3	Extremely limited user	Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
2	Intermittent user	No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
1	Non-user	Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
0	Did not attempt the test	No assessable information provided.

Appendix L: Top ten items perceived to be the most difficult by teachers and students (Adapted from Renandya and Hu, 2018)

Rank order	Student perception ($N = 301$)		Teacher perception ($N = 30$)	
	Variable	Mean	Variable	Mean
1	Complex sentences	3.81	Fast speed	3.83
2	Phonetic variations	3.78	Complex sentences	3.57
3	Missing subsequent information	3.69	Missing subsequent information	3.53
4	Speaker accent	3.68	Long sentences	3.50
5	News broadcast	3.59	News broadcast	3.50
6	Long sentences	3.53	Speaker accent	3.47
7	Background noise	3.47	Background noise	3.47
8	Catching the details	3.42	Word recognition	3.30
9	Fast speed	3.38	New words	3.30
10	New words	3.37	Phonetic variations	3.30

Appendix M: Linguistic characteristics that affect the listening difficulty (Adapted from Buck, 2001, p. 149-151)

▪ Texts with slower speech rates tend to be easier than texts with faster speech rates.
▪ Texts with longer pauses between idea units tend to be easier than texts with shorter pauses between idea units, or no pauses at all.
▪ Texts with more familiar pronunciation tend to be easier than texts with less familiar pronunciation.
▪ Texts with natural intonation patterns tend to be easier than texts with unnatural or unusual intonation patterns.
▪ Texts with more high-frequency vocabulary (i.e. common words) tend to be easier than texts with more low-frequency vocabulary.
▪ Texts with less complex grammar tend to be easier than texts with more complex grammar.
▪ Texts with idea units or clauses strung together tend to be easier than texts with ideas units or clauses embedded within other clauses.
▪ Texts with simple pronoun referencing tend to be easier than texts with more complex pronoun referencing.

Appendix N: Factors influencing listening comprehension (Adapted from Stepanoviene, 2012)

Rank	Category	Mean (SD)
1	Rate of delivery	4.42 (0.69)
2	Phonological reduction	4.21 (0.91)
3	Vocabulary	4.15 (0.97)
4	Syntactic reduction	4.06 (1.08)
5	Cross-cultural elements	4.05 (0.86)
6	Sequencing of information	4.04 (0.64)
7	Breaking down speech into words or groups of words	3.43 (0.50)
8	Lack of knowledge of English idioms	3.36 (0.49)
9	Lack of redundancy	3.33 (0.47)
10	Rhythm	3.16 (0.37)

Appendix O: Excerpts from the EfT textbook of Grade 6 (listening exercises)

Lesson 22 — **Wonders of the world-1**

After completing the lesson students will be able to
- follow instructions, commands, requests accordingly
- read and understand texts

A **Look at the pictures. What are they called?**



B **Now listen to the CD/audio and fill in the gaps of the following text:**

The pyramids are huge ..... for the ancient kings and queens of Egypt. These kings and queens are known as the ..... . It needed a few thousand .... to build the pyramids. The most famous ..... are the Giza pyramids. Giza is a place near Cairo, the ..... of Egypt. The Pyramids of ..... at Giza is the largest Egyptian pyramid. It is the only one of the .... still in existence.

C **Read the following text.**

The **Taj Mahal** is also known as "the Taj". It is a white marble tomb located in Agra in India. Do you know the story behind the Taj Mahal? The Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan loved his wife Mumtaz Mahal more than his life. Mumtaz died at an early age. Shah Jahan was very shocked at her death. So he built the Taj Mahal as a token of love for his wife. It is the place where Mumtaz is sleeping for ever.

The Taj has an area of about 1003 acres or 405 hectares. The Taj Mahal is the finest example of Mughal architecture. It combines the art of Persia, Turky, and India. It took 21 years and thousands of artisans and craftsmen to complete the Taj Mahal. The Taj is universally admired as one of the wonders of the world.